

THE INDEPENDENT

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Rail firms scoop £500m windfall

Christian Wolmar
Westminster Correspondent

Companies buying up British Rail are to share a £500m "windfall", as a result of a huge surplus in the British Rail pension fund.

The revelation of the scale of the handout to the companies, which have successfully bid for sections of BR, was not known at the time of privatisation. Last night, it led to calls from MPs and rail campaigners for the surplus to be used to benefit employees and pensioners.

That is unlikely, instead, the new companies will declare a

rather than line the pockets of the privatised companies.

Jonathan Bray, Co-ordinator of Save our Railways, the anti-rail privatisation campaign, said: "It is outrageous that the Government is prepared to allow pension fund surpluses to be raided in this way. These private companies have put nothing into the BR pension fund and they should get nothing from it."

The scheme is to be broken down into around 60 mini-funds for each of the companies which have started operating the now-privatised industry. Rail-track's share of the pensions bonanza will be more than £50m.

While the rail firms' franchises had been told there might be a surplus, no accurate information was given and the size of the surplus now presents the new companies with an unexpected bonus. Last night, a spokesman for the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising which handled the bidding process said: "We could not give accurate figures because they were not available until the actuarial assessment had been carried out."



pensions "holiday" on their contributions adding millions of pounds to their profits. But this in turn could provoke a court challenge by unions who think their members would be cheated.

The size of the surplus only came to light after an assessment of the value of the £8bn pension fund by the Government Actuary's Department. The audit found that since the last assessment three years ago, the Railways Pension Scheme had a £516m surplus thanks to a successful investment policy which in the past was based on world-class works of art.

Sir George Young, the Secretary of State for Transport, admitted to his Labour counterpart, Andrew Smith, that the issue of pension surpluses is "highly emotive". In a letter to Mr Smith, he said that it was normal business practice for firms to use surpluses to declare pension contribution holidays for themselves.

Mr Smith said: "I call on Sir George to give assurances that the pension surplus will be used to enhance benefits for existing staff and future pensioners,

Documents provided to bidders stressed that any surpluses could be used for pension contribution holidays. In a letter leaked to *The Independent*, Sir George told the BR pensioners' federation: "The issue is simply about getting value for money for businesses, sales and franchises. The information did not imply that the trustees would approve a particular distribution of surpluses."

The trustees of the pension fund are being lobbied fiercely by the trade unions representing rail employees not to allow the new companies merely to declare pension contribution holidays for themselves. All but one of the 30 new mini-funds set up by 1 April this year, when the actuary carried out the survey, is in surplus. Since then another 30 have been created and most are expected to be in surplus.

While the 300,000 rail pensioners are not in danger of losing any of their full entitlement, if companies declare pensions holidays, it will reduce the potential for extra benefits for existing employees in later years.

Under pension legislation, surpluses above 5 percent of the value of the scheme are liable to heavy rates of tax and therefore cannot be retained. Companies are allowed to use up to 60 per cent of this surplus for pension contribution holidays.



Alastair Marriott, a sensational new Ugly Sister in the Royal Ballet's production of Sir Frederick Ashton's *Cinderella*, which opens in London tonight, adjusts his nose, a wicked copy of the real nose of Sir Robert Helpmann, who famously danced the same role over 20 years ago

Europe treaty summit waits for Blair

Sarah Helm
Brussels

European leaders are preparing to delay completion of a treaty to reform the union until after the target date of June, in order to help Tony Blair. They accept that the Labour leader is elected next May, he will not have time to sign the treaty at the Amsterdam summit in June.

Despite public declarations that the treaty will be signed next June, a delay of four months is currently being canvassed among heads of government. A concluding summit is now planned for October in Luxembourg.

European leaders are also offering special channels of communication to Labour, ahead of the election, to ensure that Mr Blair is kept informed of treaty negotiations and is able to conduct talks with his future partners.

The Netherlands, which assumes the six-month European Union presidency in January, is proposing to keep Mr Blair, and Robin Cook, the shadow Foreign Secretary, fully briefed on developments in the negotiations.

The moves demonstrate how European governments are now counting on the election of Mr Blair as prime minister, probably next May, and are already preparing to welcome him into their fold. Frustrated by years of sniping by the Conservatives, they are now eagerly awaiting a more positive contribution from Labour as they attempt to deepen integration, which John Major has insisted he will block.

Labour has publicly insisted that it would be ready to sign the treaty by the Amsterdam summit and has not formally requested a delay. However, the task of negotiating complex and far-reaching treaty changes in a few weeks would be daunting for an incoming government. Furthermore, the party clearly does not want to be "ambushed" into signing away powers without adequate time to consider the implications.

Mr Cook has let it be known that Labour would not be prepared to sign up to a treaty it had not had time fully to examine. He is understood to have hinted, during a recent meeting in London with Jacques Poos, the Luxembourg Prime Minister, that it might be wise to make "contingency plans" for a delay. Luxembourg, which takes

over the EU presidency in the second half of next year, has therefore canvassed other EU countries, and the European Commission, on later dates. A preparatory summit is envisaged for July, and a final summit for October.

Britain's partners have been wary of delay, for fear of setting back the process of enlarging the EU to the east. However, it is not only in Labour's interests to secure a delay. Treaty changes are all subject to a national veto, and the EU needs Britain's co-operation if it is to complete its next reform project.

Comment, page 13

Lucky Ernie: from dazed old man to rich adviser

Steve Boggan
Chief Reporter

Five years ago, a doctor told the Court of Appeal that Ernest Saunders did not know how to use a door, could not count backwards from three to one and had no idea who was the President of the United States.

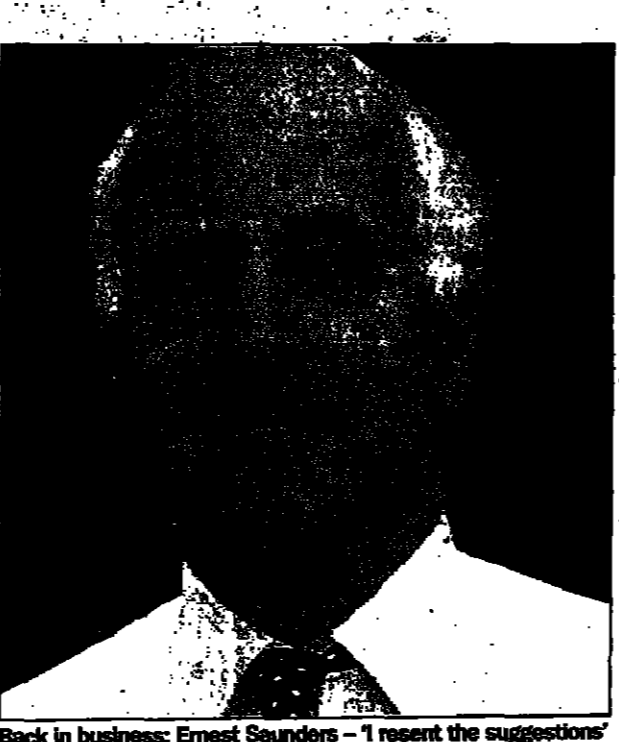
It was one of several pieces of evidence that pointed to a form of pre-senile dementia, described as an Alzheimer's-type of disease. The "diagnosis" was one reason why the former chairman of Guinness, served just 10 months in prison for his part in the fraudulent £2.7bn takeover of Distillers 10 years ago.

Today, while a mentally agile Mr Saunders is busy charging £800 a day as a business consultant, the European Court of Human Rights will hand down a judgment which is expected to agree with his claim that the investigation into the affair contravened his human rights.

It will not overturn the conviction for his role in an illegal scheme to boost the price of Guinness shares during the takeover bid. It will most likely agree that the power of Department of Trade and Industry inspectors to require suspects to talk - used against Mr Saunders and threatening him with two years' imprisonment if he refused - infringes a person's right to silence.

And it will provide a platform from which the 61-year-old can launch what could be expensive compensation claim for the Government.

Yesterday, benefiting from the recovery that has baffled doctors - dementia is irre-



Back in business: Ernest Saunders - 'I resent the suggestions'

ness and responded indignantly. "The idea that I could persuade members of the medical profession that I had this condition is disgraceful," he said. "I was ill, very ill. I was on various drugs and I lost a lot of weight. I was hardly myself. It is an insult to the medical profession to suggest that I put on some sort of act and that they were fooled by it. I resent the fact that these suggestions are made. If people are not able to accept the facts... what can I do?"

The doctor who expressed concern over Mr Saunders' use of a door was Dr Patrick Galloway, a forensic psychiatrist at the Exeter Nuffield Hospital. But he was not alone. Three others, including a doctor for the prosecution, said they had similar concerns.

"We never made a diagnosis but all the doctors agreed that there was some suspicion of pre-senile dementia," said Dr Galloway yesterday. "Happily, this turned out not to be the case. In the early stages of Alzheimer's or pre-senile dementia, it can be very difficult to make a diagnosis, so we did not make one; we expressed worries about it."

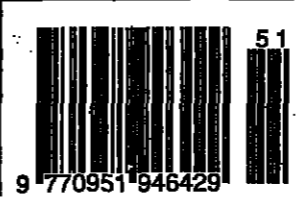
"He had an abnormality in a brain scan. It was not just a psychological examination. I haven't examined him since but, happily, he seems to have recovered."

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The Formula One team owner, Frank Williams is to stand trial in Italy on manslaughter charges over the death of the former world champion Ayrton Senna at the San Marino Grand Prix. Williams is to be charged along with technical director Patrick Head, and the chief designer Adrian Newey. Page 22	Foreign News 7-9
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news

Tory Taliban stall in fight for no man's land

Like the Afghan capital of Kabul, the Prime Minister has been fought over for several years now, changing hands several times as the fortunes of war have ebbed and flowed. Even on a quiet day the observer can hear the loud clump of an occasional rocket landing in one of his suburbs, as the warring factions fight for control.

Over the past 12 months advantage seemed to lie with the Euro-sceptical Taliban. Wherever these zealots take control, French language tapes and teach-yourself German videos are unrolled and left festooning the lampposts; traitors such as Douglas Hurd are seized from their sanctuaries in the Midland Bank and strung up as a warning; and the satanic designs of the foreign infidels



A stocky general with florid face and capacious arsenal decided that enough was enough

are cursed in public places by religious leaders.

Earlier this year it looked as though this faction would soon be in firm control of the battered Mr Major. Its mujahedin were encamped upon his ruined approaches, gaining a triumph over a referendum. The tattered, demoralised forces of the establishment were put to headlong flight, and complete victory was not far off. From being a small band of religious extremists polishing their antique weapons, the Tory Taliban were close to being the government of a leading European nation.

And then – suddenly – the forces of reason made a stand. A stocky general with florid face and capacious arsenal decided that enough was enough. Ken Clarke and his

Uzbeks dug in, threatening to wreak just as much death and destruction as their fundamentalist opponents. Within days Major seemed to be mostly in their hands, refusing Taliban demands to rule out a single currency.

Yesterday's skirmishes showed that a temporary stalemate had been reached, and was likely to last over the traditional Festival of Christmas. For, as the Prime Minister answered questions about the Dublin summit, both sides contented themselves with walking around in front of him, parading their weapons.

"Look at my rocket-propelled grenades," one side would say. "And my Scuds," the other would echo. The only unequivocal support that Major could rely on was that

of the veteran tribal matriarch Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman, who would encourage him by loudly shouting "hear, hear", down the tube of her bazooka.

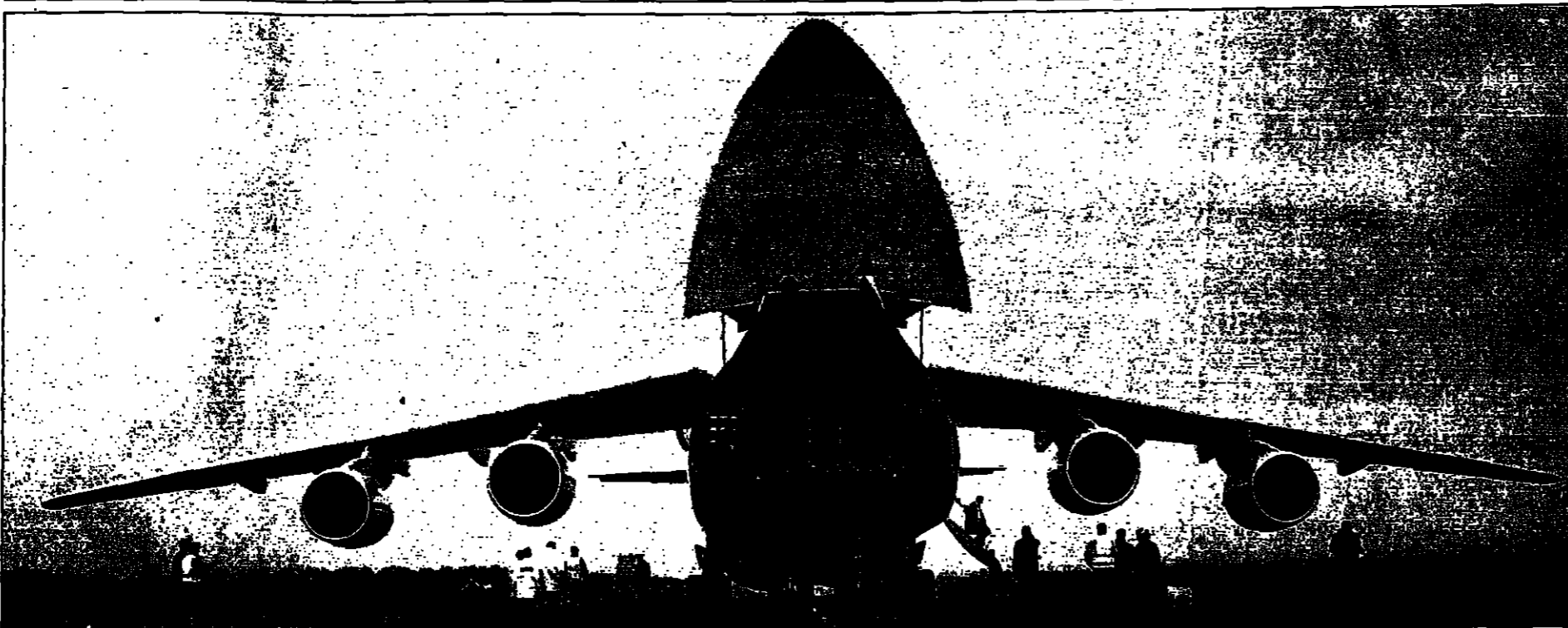
One or two of the more flamboyant mujahedin sallied up to the PM's ramparts and fired off a shot. Norman Lamont asked what example existed "in history of a single currency that did not lead to a single government?" We were indeed in uncharted waters, Mr Major replied. The multi of Wokingham, John Redwood, wanted to know what benefit Britain had got for all the little things (vetoes and stuff) that it had given up to the Great European Satan?

There were even some rumbles from the more pacific villages on the plains. David Wilshire (Spelthorne)

said that his kinfolk liked the Common Market but not the single currency. If they got the latter, then they might revolt against the former.

There was time for one more Taliban tactic – infiltration. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle) came through the gates smuggling a bomb under his turban. If some other countries fudged the entry criteria might the PM declare against the whole enterprise "in the early summer"? The early summer? Like, er, 1 May for example?

Answer came there none, and Mr Leigh and compatriots retired to their winter headquarters, to prepare for their spring offensive – an offensive to conquer a land that is now hardly worth governing.



Treats on board: An aircraft taking off from Liverpool yesterday with 200,000 shoeboxes of gifts collected by Operation Christmas Child for Armenian children Photograph: David Rose

Major fears fatal damage to EU

Anthony Bevens and Fran Abrams

John Major warned the Commons yesterday that it could inflict "fatal" damage on the European Union, and British membership, if the wrong decisions were taken on the single currency.

Walking a political tightrope between the Eurosceptics and Euro-sceptics within his own party – in advance of a parliamentary statement on BSE, and a debate on European fisheries policy – the Prime Minister struck a note of menace in a statement on the weekend EU summit in Dublin.

Talking up the threats faced at June's Amsterdam summit – after the next election – Mr Major said the

EU was approaching some "historic decisions" over the next 18 months. Those decisions extended beyond the single currency to the questions of political development being considered by the inter-governmental conference. "The choices made will determine not only the success and stability of Europe as a whole, but Britain's relationship with it," Mr Major said.

Shadow Foreign Secretary Robin Cook last night challenged Mr Major to clarify that hint, after Downing Street sources were alleged to have briefed newspapers that he was trying "to put Britain's withdrawal from the European Union on to the agenda".

But the calculated hint of possible retrenchment, if not withdrawal, was

later clarified by Mr Major, who told Salisbury Tory MP Robert Key that withdrawal was a delusion. "Those people who peddle that delusion are certainly not considering what the British national interest would be, or what the implications of leaving the European Union would be," he said.

Mr Major also told David Wilshire, the Euro-sceptic Tory MP for Spelthorne, that there was no question of disengagement at a time when Europe faced the most vital question on the single currency.

"Our input into that decision may have a material impact upon whether the whole prospect goes ahead or not, if the criteria are wrong," he said. "And if it goes ahead in the wrong circum-

stances, I think the damage to our membership of the European Union and the European Union itself might well be fatal."

Mr Major also returned to the attack against Tony Blair, who is being portrayed by the Tories as someone who would sell out British interests. The Labour leader baited Mr Major as a Prime Minister who was afraid of staging a Commons vote on the single currency, and as the leader of a government that had incompetently handled the BSE crisis. But the Prime Minister said of Mr Blair: "If he follows the policies he has advocated so far, the Amsterdam summit would be a Dutch auction of British sovereignty."

Opening the fisheries debate, agri-

culture minister Tony Baldry promised a tough stance on Europe in an attempt to ward off a threatened Commons defeat. Mr Baldry said he would press for changes to curb quota-hopping – in which foreign firms buy up British fishing quotas – at a meeting of European ministers later this week.

He also promised to review the Government's approach to European rules which favour fishermen in the Irish Republic at the expense of those in the North. The system has angered Ulster Unionists, on whose support the Government's majority now depends.

"I don't think there is any disagreement in this House that the Common Fisheries Policy is not working as it was intended," Mr Baldry said.

significant shorts

Crumbling classrooms to stay

Local authorities have been told they can borrow only a fifth of what they say is needed next year to repair and rebuild crumbling school buildings.

Government figures out yesterday reveal councils will be allowed to borrow up to £422m for schools buildings, projects – £46m less than last year. By contrast, capital allocations for voluntary-aided and for grant-maintained schools, both outside local authority control, have risen compared with this year.

Education minister Cheryl Gillan said the total available to schools amounted to almost £700m. But Labour said the allocation was not enough to tackle a crisis in the condition of school buildings. Lucy Ward

Fiennes admits polar defeat

Sir Ranulph Fiennes last night announced he was giving up his Antarctic expedition. The explorer had been hoping to return to continue his bid to become the first man to walk solo across the Antarctic after being forced to seek hospital treatment in Chile for painful kidney stones.

Last night he said: "This was an enormously vital dream to me," he said. "To have something like this happen on an expedition which is looking like an overwhelming success is a kick in the teeth."

Explosives find in Ulster

Army bomb disposal experts yesterday recovered an amount of explosives from a vehicle which was abandoned close to the Northern Ireland border with the Irish Republic 10 days ago. The material, together with a number of booster tubes, was contained in one of two stolen vehicles close to Roslea on the Co Fermanagh border.

GP jailed for sex assault

A doctor who admitted a sex offence against a woman patient has been jailed for nine months. Warrington GP Christopher Kamar admitted indecently assaulting the woman in 1993.

Woman alive after river fall

A pregnant woman was rescued from freezing water last night after apparently jumping from the Humber suspension bridge. The woman, who has not been named, lost her baby.

Palestinians jailed for Israel embassy blasts

Two Palestinian terrorists who carried out a bombing campaign against Jewish targets in London were each jailed for 20 years at the Old Bailey yesterday.

Samar Alami and Jawad Botmek were part of a terrorist cell which was put in place to sabotage the Middle East peace process with two massive car bombs which rocked the Israeli embassy and a Jewish charity in July 1994.

Both had used their student status in the United Kingdom as a cover for their terrorist activities.

Millennium Tower setback

Plans for a quarter-mile high Millennium Tower for the City of London have received a serious setback with the Royal Fine Art Commission declining to support the idea.

The 1,265ft skyscraper – which if built would dwarf the Canary Wharf tower and be visible for 20 miles around – was described by the Commission as "simply out of scale" and therefore believed the project should not go ahead, chairman Lord St John of Fawsley said.

Smoking stars win award

Comedian Jo Brand and *Men Behaving Badly* star Martin Clunes were singled out as defiant smokers in the awards of pro-tobacco group Forest yesterday.

Clunes won Forest's approval by asking if he could smoke during a recording of BBC2 news quiz *Have I Got News For You?* Brand was hailed "the most smoked, friendly television star" by Forest "for sticking steadfastly to her right to smoke".

101 reasons for Disney to cheer

Disney's 101 *Dalmatians* broke seasonal British box office records in its first weekend, distributors said last night.

The live-action remake of Disney's animation classic took £2.4m in three days, the biggest December opening in British cinema history.

The film, which stars Glenn Close as the wicked Cruella de Vil, and 280 spotty dogs, also broke box office records in the United States.

Vote for strike

Coal miners have voted for a series of one day strikes in the New Year over pay and conciliation procedures, the National Union of Mineworkers announced yesterday.

Cattle cull is 'political gesture' to shift ban

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

There was still no early lifting of the ban on British beef exports in sight last night in spite of the Government's U-turn to introduce a selective cull of more than 100,000 cattle, costing £150m.

Douglas Hogg, the Minister of State for Agriculture, told MPs the additional cull was ordered by the Cabinet as a political gesture to persuade Britain's European partners to allow lifting the ban, but no timetable for lifting the ban has been given.

"BSE will die out from the

national herd around 2001 naturally. The cull will not reinforce animal safety. The justification for the cull is that unless we carry out the cull, we are not going to get progress on the lifting of the ban. That is a political fact and not a scientific fact," he said.

Mr Hogg will submit plans to European agriculture ministers today for a certified herd scheme as the first step to relaxing the ban. As a second, confidence building measure, the selective cull of animals judged most at risk from BSE will begin in January, but tracing the cattle could delay completion for six months.

Tony Blair, the Labour leader,

accused John Major of "serial incompetence" over his handling of the crisis. The total cost of the cull of all cattle aged over 30 months, which may contain BSE, has cost over £20m.

A 19-year-old woman from Carlisle, Cumbria, was confirmed yesterday as the latest victim of the "new variant" of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD), thought to be caused by exposure to BSE-infected meat products. Victoria Lowther died four months after first showing signs of the new strain of CJD. According to the Department of Health, there have been 14 confirmed cases in the UK – 10 occurring this year.

Rise in slaughter fails to bring end to embargo

Katherine Butler
Brussels

The European Agriculture Commissioner, Franz Fischler, poured cold water yesterday on hopes for any immediate easing of the ban on British beef.

The additional cull, he said, was one of the pre-conditions in the Florence agreement last June which Britain signed up to. That framework committed the Government to implementing a sweeping BSE eradication programme in return for a phased lifting of the embargo. "I think we need to move forward step by step as agreed," Mr Fischler said.

The commission was still waiting for Britain to submit its proposals for securing the removal of the ban on beef from herds certified BSE-free. This is the first phase of a return to normal trade envisaged under the Florence deal.

The Agriculture Minister, Douglas Hogg, will tell European counterparts in Brussels today that Britain has now met the five Florence pre-conditions: it has set up a computerised cattle tracing system and brought in cattle "passports", while the possession of contaminated cattle feed has been criminalised and more than a million cattle over the

age of 30 months have been slaughtered.

However, Britain's blueprint for meeting the EU conditions on BSE-free herds will not go to Brussels until the new year. It will then have to be evaluated by two expert veterinary committees before the commission can decide whether or not to allow exports of meat from these special grass-fed herds, a bureaucratic procedure which could take several weeks at least. Member states are in any case expected to react cautiously with the Germans likely to argue that BSE must be fully eradicated in Britain before any lifting of the trade ban.

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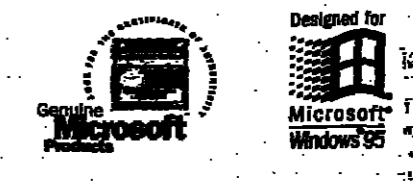


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Don't cry for me, I'm Madonnevita

The story of a hustler who uses people and the media to get to the top is really the story of the actress

David Lister

When Madonna brings her idiosyncratic style to London on Thursday for the United Kingdom premiere of *Evita*, her persona and the hype surrounding it will have an uneasy resonance of the Rainbow Tour which Eva Peron herself made of European capitals in the Forties.

Madonna will even look the part. Unlike most actresses, she will not wish to distance herself from her role on screen. For the Los Angeles premiere at the weekend she ensured that Forties costume and facial make-up made her look like the former first lady of Argentina.

In the new film of the Tim Rice/Andrew Lloyd Webber musical *Madonna* makes a memorable Eva Peron. The performance may lack emotion, or the power to move. But this is more than compensated for by the panache, worldly-wise cynicism – and by the curious sensation for the audience at yesterday's national press screening that the story of a determined hustler who will use both people and the world's media to get to the top, is the story of the actress, as well as that of the woman she is playing.

Madonna even used the old-fashioned method of writing the British director Alan Parker a begging letter to get the part. Nor did she let a small inconvenience, such as becoming pregnant during shooting, put her off. This was the part that she was born to play.

Parker himself says: "She is extraordinarily accomplished and has given everything to make this film. I find it hard now to even conceive of anybody playing the part as well as she has done it."

Nor could he have conceived that



In vogue: The changing image of Madonna from the Material Girl to the First Lady of Argentina, beside the real Evita (bottom right) Photomontage: Joe Jenkins/Montage

the most successful female recording artist in the world would take singing lessons in order to ensure that she could manage the Lloyd Webber score.

But she did, just as she stepped in after a year of difficulties to persuade the Argentinean President, Carlos Menem, to allow her to sing Don't Cry For Me Argentina on the presidential balcony. She secured a private audience with him.

As the two of them were eating pizza and making small talk, Madonna

suddenly interjected, New York style, with: "Let's cut to the chase here. Do we have the balcony or don't we?" President Menem nodded: "You have the balcony."

The Los Angeles premiere saw a typical Madonna performance. Although she can have the pick of any designer in the world, she chose a friend, Susan Becker, who is unknown in the fashion world, and who gave her a garish and universally loathed tacky red velvet suit with a giant flower at the waist, feathers and

flowers above, spike heeled shoes which were out of period for the Forties look, all beneath a towering red hat fringed by a black veil.

Eva Peron, a devotee of Christian Dior, would not have approved. As always with Madonna, the doubting fingers as to whether this was a disastrously inept choice or a calculated move to get onto the world's front pages through sheer audacity – and give a girlfriend a hand up at the same time.

She will be in safer hands in London on

Thursday. She has decided to wear a Gianni Versace creation. The designer has promised to make a pastiche of the outfit that Dior actually made for the real Evita. He has offered Madonna a choice of outfits, including a tiger-print frock coat, a sleek, golden silk dress, a grey sheath gown and a pink frock with detachable train.

She will also be wearing a Versace outfit the following night for the Italian premiere in Rome – the frock coat with embroidered collar. She can afford to flaunt. The ear-

ly reviews of her performance in the £39m film are good. *Variety* said: "Madonna gives her all to the title role and pulls it off superbly."

The critic, like many of us who have seen the film, also thought that it was "an objet d'art that evokes serious viewer admiration more than passionate excitement".

Another critic said of the star: "This is her role: a Material Girl desperately seeking sainthood."

In an interview with *USA Weekend* magazine, Madonna said she believed that playing the part of Eva

Peron had been her destiny. "It was something that only I could do." She said she became engrossed in the character while making the film, and described the process as all-consuming.

"I had to learn how to tango and study that for several months, and then the physical transformation, defining her physicality with hair styles and brown contacts and false teeth."

Madonna added: "No one else could have done it. And I survived. It was like surviving a war."

Blonde ambition: A life and times

Stated ambition: "I won't be happy until I'm as famous as God." Born Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone 16 August 1958 in Rochester, Michigan. Won dance scholarship to Michigan University but dropped out and went to New York at the age of 20 to make records.

Struggled until 1983, when her first album, *Madonna*, sold three million copies. In 1985 appeared at Live Aid. Her second album, *Like A Virgin*, combined with a studiously vampish and feisty streetwise image, intensified media interest.

Her song "Material Girl" (1985) combined a lavish video with Marilyn Monroe iconography, exciting dance production and assertive materialism at the right moment in the eighties. It rapidly became a role model for many young women.

Two films, *Vision Quest* and *Desperately Seeking Susan*, were followed by international hits such as "Like a Prayer" and "Vogue", exploring diverse interests such as Catholicism, fashion and eroticism. Her fashion exploration included appearing on stage in Gaultier-designed cone-shaped metal bras.

In August 1985 married actor Sean Penn, but later divorced. In 1992 she took a step too far. After flaunting publicity-achieving relationships with other women, her misconceived coffee-table book *SEX* featured soft-porn photos and her album *Erotica* did badly, as her following began to have second thoughts.

Her career flagging, she begged for and won the role of *Evita*. She became pregnant by her personal trainer, Carlos Leon, during filming.

Daughter Lourdes Maria Ciccone Leon born in October.

Impact of embryo science examined

Liz Hunt on a symposium tackling dilemma of fertility treatment

Strasbourg — The psychological impact of test-tube baby treatments which reduce men to the role of "sperm provider", and position women simply as "baby-making" machines, has been widely underestimated by doctors, a leading fertility specialist warned yesterday.

Professor Israel Nisand, a French obstetrician and gynaecologist, described the paradox in which scientists had "mastered the creation of man by man" but with de-humanising consequences largely ignored by them.

"The 1960s witnessed the advent of sexuality without procreation; the 1980s heralded procreation without sexuality," he said on the opening day of a European symposium which will attempt to resolve some of the medical, legal, and ethical questions raised by modern fertility treatments.

The events of last summer in the UK, which saw an impassioned debate over the dispos-

al of "orphaned" embryos; the decision by a woman to abort one of the healthy twins she was carrying; and the case of Mandy Allwood, pregnant with eight babies after taking a fertility drug, has highlighted the dilemmas faced by all developed countries where medical progress has outstripped society's attempts to deal with the legal and moral aspects.

Where legislation has been introduced, its failings and inflexibility have been cruelly exposed, as in the case of Diane Blood, the woman denied the right to use her dead husband's sperm to have a child despite widespread support of doctors and the public.

Speaking about the psychological repercussions of fertility treatment, Professor Nisand, a lecturer at the Université Paris V, said eroticism had been separated from parenthood, and instead the "intimate and private sphere of sexual relations [had] become the field of

operation for highly specialised medical procedures... physical intimacy, normally experienced in a spontaneous manner gives way to the alienating experience of a mechanical body."

Post-coital tests, masturbation in hospital, a thermometer on the bedside table and temperature curves, the trappings of fertility treatment, are all threats to a couple's wellbeing.

Studies show that despite being given precise information on success rates, couples persistently over-estimate their chances of a baby – putting it at a 60-90 per cent success rate compared with the average of about 14 per cent.

Professor Nisand warned that "while there are children in the world who are not wanted, there are also children who are wanted too much".

He urged doctors to avoid "technical totalitarianism" and treat couples as individuals, having the courage to defer or refuse treatment if necessary.

Meropi Michaleli, a psychologist from Athens, told the 400 delegates attending the conference that rapid advances in reproductive medicine since the birth of the first test tube baby, Louise Brown, in 1978, had reduced infertility to simply a disorder of the reproductive apparatus.

She welcomed the fact that a psychologist had been asked to present the first paper at the symposium, organised by the Council of Europe.

"I believe that treating sterility first means treating the psychological suffering of sterility, and that the child – whether natural or adopted – can only come afterwards," she said.

The Third Council of Europe Bioethics Symposium will determine the contents of a protocol for the protection of the human embryo to be included in the draft convention on human rights and biomedicine which is now under discussion by ministers.

'I was simply a sperm provider'

Glenda Cooper

The experience of *in vitro* fertilisation treatment is one that John and Wendy (not their real names) have done their best to blank out of their minds.

They underwent IVF treatment for a total of six years, but Wendy failed to conceive and in the end they adopted instead.

John, in particular, looks back with a shudder at a process that was "so unpleasant I have tried to wipe my memory of it." He said: "IVF is never going to be much fun, and I think we knew that, but it takes years and it does get you down."

They both found the procedure de-humanising and far-removed from the joy most couples go through in expecting a baby. Instead, they felt they were treated

in an offhand way by medical staff who did not see infertility as a true problem.

John felt he was relegated to a sperm provider, expected to come up with the goods whatever the situation. "You had to go down a corridor and masturbate in the toilet," he said. "You could hear the cleaners talking outside while you were in there. There were no facilities – it was, like, 'here's a jar...'"

"It was awful. You've got to produce a sperm sample that is the best you can do, and I don't know how you were meant to provide this in these circumstances."

John felt he was perceived as no more than "a support role for my wife." For Wendy, the situation was no easier. "At the

time, there wasn't very much money in the NHS for fertility treatment so the doctors who gave it were struggling on a very small budget in a little corner of the hospital."

"It made me very angry a lot of the time the way we were treated," said John. "My wife and I were never really properly diagnosed. One doctor eventually said to me that I could father the population of Bangladesh and there was nothing wrong with my fertility, which was totally at odds with everything else we had been told."

"You're meant to be gearing yourself up to go to these sessions and it is terribly, terribly stressful. The attitude you feel that people have is that 'well, you're not ill'."

"We ended up hating the doctor who treated us. He made a lot of money out of us. I didn't enjoy any of it."

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news

Dorrell takes sting out of GPs' complaints

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

Stephen Dorrell, the Secretary of State for Health, will today seek to neutralise family doctors as a weapon for the Labour Party in the election, with a package of 70 initiatives to improve morale among GPs. Mr Dorrell will publish a White Paper in effect meeting a shopping list of demands for which GPs have campaigned for years.

Although the detailed initiatives will be seen as small in themselves, the White Paper is aimed at tackling low morale and stop the GPs being recruited by Tony Blair in the election.

Family doctors are regarded as important opinion-formers in their communities, and ministers are clearly determined to keep them happy until the election is over.

Labour may cry "foul" over

the White Paper which includes pilot schemes for GP joint commissioning - the system which Labour believes ought to replace GP fundholding, and which has led to clashes between Mr Dorrell and Chris Smith, his Labour counterpart.

The White Paper, called *Primary Care: Delivering the Future*, offers GPs more incentives to rejoin practices after career breaks to start a family, more retraining, a doubling to £50m

of the money for research and development, and inclusion in the NHS pension scheme for practice teams.

GP fundholders are to be given the right to use savings on budgets for health care to invest in new premises or land for buildings. They will be helped with loans or grants to buy themselves out of leases on poor premises.

The White Paper will herald a fresh drive to get private fi-

nance into capital projects for family doctor services on the NHS. Ministers deny it will mean privatising the health service. Private money may be used for building new cottage hospitals, where patients could undergo operations closer to their homes.

The plans include extending the nurse prescribing pilot scheme from April 1997 in 500 GPs practices where a total of 1,500 nurses will be given pre-

scribing power. The aim would be to throw it open to the rest of the country by April 1998.

The White Paper fills the gaps left by the NHS Primary Care Bill, which enables a wide range of pilot schemes for the expansion of family doctor services from April 1998.

The Bill faces Labour challenges in the committee stage today in the House of Lords. Baroness Jay, the Labour shadow health minister in the Lords,

has tabled an amendment to stop private companies proposing pilot schemes, which could forbid Unichem, the chain of pharmacists, from going ahead with plans to run surgeries incorporating their own chemists' shops.

Labour regards the health service as its strongest battleground for the general election, but Mr Dorrell has intensified the pressure by issuing a string of policy initiatives, focusing on

the Government's strategy for expanding family doctor services to include more services. The BMA fears it could drain money away from hospitals.

Labour may see the White Paper as an attempt to divert attention from a threatened winter crisis in NHS hospitals, where GPs have been forced in some areas to delay operations until next April when some of the extra £1.6bn for the NHS becomes available.

Tories set to spend £7m on election drive

Anthony Bevins
Political Editor

The election campaign will move into a New Year gear next month, with Labour warning local activists that the Tories are planning a £7m propaganda drive from 6 January.

A letter sent out to party volunteers in Labour's target marginal constituencies says: "This will be a massive campaign which will lie about Labour and lie about their own record in government. And it will have an effect."

The Conservatives are said to have booked thousands of poster sites to carry permanent displays through to the election, which will be held between the end of February and 1 May. Fearing the impact of the Tories' expensive campaign, Labour is planning a pre-emptive strike, with a cost-cutting leaflet drop concentrated on non-Tory households identified by census returns. Labour's problem is that it has not got a clue as to what the Conservative posters will be saying. It is hoping for a leak on the attack.

The Conservatives' strategic themes are known to be Blair and tax, a repeat of the successful formula used during the last election: Kinnock and tax. In that campaign, Neil Kinnock's record of mind-changes - from Europe through to nuclear disarmament - cast doubt on his trustworthiness. Labour's shadow budget was used to bolster the

line that Mr Kinnock was planning to drop a "tax bombshell" on middle-income voters.

The up-dated version continues to argue that Labour will drop a "tax bombshell", if only to finance spending commitments that have been totted up to £30bn by civil servants working to definitions set by Conservative ministers. It is thought that Mr Blair is reluctant to approve any threat to increase tax rates for the wealthy, for fear of giving the Tories ammunition.

As for the personal attack on Mr Blair, ministers argue that he, too, is not to be trusted because he once contested a general election on a manifesto urging withdrawal from the European Economic Community, and was once a supporter of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

The trouble for the Conservatives is that following Mr Major's promises during the last election, and his record since, they are no longer trusted on taxation. The voters trust Mr Blair much more than they trusted Mr Kinnock.

A Labour leadership source said yesterday that they would reply positively to the negative message. But each response will contain a sideswipe against the Tories, arguing that Labour stands for the future, as opposed to the past; that it will fight for the many, not the few who have thrived under the Conservatives; and that it will offer strong leadership, rather than the weakness seen in Mr Major.

RUSKIN COLLEGE OXFORD



On the platform: Tony Blair, the Labour leader, in Oxford yesterday, giving a speech which pledged Labour's financial support for standards in classrooms Photograph: Tom Pilon

Blair promises more investment in education

Judith Judd
Education Editor

There will be more money for education under a Labour government, Tony Blair, the Labour leader, promised yesterday.

In a speech at Ruskin College, Oxford, where 20 years ago the former Labour prime minister Lord Callaghan attacked school standards, Mr Blair went further than before in spelling out his

commitment to "steady, consistent investment" in education.

Under the Tories, the costs of economic failure and inequality such as unemployment benefit had gone up. "We want to turn that around, spend less on leaving people unemployed and invest more in education," he said.

But, while there would be growth in education, Labour would be wise rather than big spenders. "It is wrong to think that this government has not

spent a lot of money on education. They have - but on the wrong things." The plan to switch money from assisted places to reducing class sizes was typical of Labour's approach. A Labour secretary of state for education should have a higher status than his predecessors, he said.

Mr Blair added that Labour would not wait until a school was failing before it took action. It would give local authorities the powers to step in.

Announcing plans for heads of successful schools to take over their failing neighbours, he said:

"While it will not [always] be appropriate, encouraging... leadership teams in successful schools to take on responsibility for underperforming schools could provide a lifeline for schools caught in a vicious circle of low expectation, poor management, declining rolls and low morale."

He repeated his pledge that

Labour would weed out incompetent teachers.

Local authorities welcomed the speech. But Nigel de Gruchy, general secretary of the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers said: "The principle that education authorities should intervene in failing schools is unchallengeable. I wonder why, having had that this power for over 50 years, they fail lamentably to use it."

Doug McAvoy, the general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, attacked Mr Blair for his continual concentration on schools which were failing, when most were successful.

Gillian Shephard, the Secretary of State for Education, yesterday refused to rule out a "hit squad" of educational experts for the Ridings School, Halifax, which was temporarily closed two months ago after discipline collapsed.

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Word craft: Tony message amended Photograph: Nick Tapsell

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LOW COST INTERNATIONAL CALLS

Run-down city centres win £900m in grants

In a multi-million pound government package aimed at regenerating run-down town centres the Secretary of State for the Environment, John Gummer, yesterday pledged £900m in cash grants and approved a further £600m priority borrowing schemes for councils.

The funding will result in a variety of schemes, including improving housing and transport and facilities for young people. Projects such as updating shopping centres and clearing land for industry will be boosted by public and private investment and aim to bring long-term jobs and prosperity to run-down areas.

But the awards met with criticism from local government associations who said last night that they did not make up for government cuts.

The cash grants are part of the Government's Single Regeneration Budget Challenge,

which is in its third year. The 180 new schemes, plus 370 already approved, are expected to generate £7.5bn of private-sector funding, in addition to £3bn from the Government over seven years.

Winning schemes chosen by Mr Gummer included a £12m plan by the London Boroughs Recycling Consortium to provide every household in London with a recycling bin for rubbish by the millennium. A spokesman for the consortium said: "This initial cash, though less than we hoped, is a good start to help boroughs get door-to-door recycling schemes off the ground."

There was £9.5m for Stockport in Cheshire, which will receive a £5.18m to bring new life into its historic centre and can earmark a further £3.75m for a scheme to improve the environment. And the Cross River Partnership in London was given

£11.6m for improving crossings along the River Thames.

Mr Gummer told a conference in London yesterday the Capital Challenge scheme had allowed local authorities rather than government to decide the priorities. He said: "The schemes will support a number of economic development projects, with elements of local area regeneration and development, education and training projects, and expenditure on infrastructure."

However, the awards were criticised last night by local government associations who said they were too small - and left too many bidders disappointed. A joint statement by the Association of County Councils, Association of District Councils and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities said: "Money for regenerating local communities should be based on need, not competition."

Justice body to be named

Patricia Wynn Davies
Legal Affairs Editor

The long-awaited Criminal Cases Review Commission will finally begin its work on 1 January, a full three years after its recommendation by the 1993 Royal Commission on Criminal Justice.

The members of the commission, which takes over scrutiny of alleged miscarriages of justice from the discredited C3 section at the Home Office, will be disclosed tomorrow in a written Commons answer. But the list - the chairman, Sir Frederick Crawford, was named in the summer - could be as noteworthy for who is not on it as for those who are.

One third of the commissioners must be lawyers and two-thirds must have knowledge and experience of the criminal justice system.

Several candidates with knowledge of miscarriages of justice failed to make any headway. They include all three members of the independent Just Television company - David Jessel, Steve Hayward and Steve Phelps - who have campaigned for people who had been wrongly convicted.

Chris Price, the former Labour MP and director of the former Leeds Polytechnic, failed to get an interview after applying to be chairman, even though he had experience of running a

big-budget organisation and had campaigned for the Condon brothers, whose convictions were quashed by the Court of Appeal.

Martin Short, the author of a book on Freemasonry, was rejected as a potential member. Sir Frederick, a leading Freemason and former scientist, company director and vice-chancellor of Aston University, was picked from 124 candidates. The Home Office had failed to check whether he was a Freemason, and the question was added as an afterthought to the application forms.

Sir Frederick will be questioned on Freemasonry by the Commons Select Committee on Home Affairs in the new year.

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In Wonderland: Claire Severs takes pictures of four-year-old dancing toadstools who are appearing in the caterpillar scene in performances of *Alice* given by the Claire Severs Dance Academy at Parliament Hill Girls School, north-west London, during their Christmas term

Photograph: Laurie Lewis

Transplants of pigs' hearts and kidneys to be allowed next year

Charles Arthur
Science Editor

Plans to go ahead despite fears of viral diseases being passed to humans

The Government is expected to allow the transplant of specially bred pigs' hearts and kidneys into humans, in a report to be published next year.

The move is expected despite new scientific findings which have discovered that some genetic material from viruses in pigs could cross over into humans, where it might cause totally new diseases – or have no effect at all.

The Department of Health denied yesterday that it has delayed the publication of an advisory report, chaired by Professor Ian Kennedy of King's College London, into "xenotransplantation", which

puts organs from a different species into humans. Such transplants, using animals which have been genetically engineered not to cause tissue rejection, could ease the enormous pressure for human organ donors, who presently meet only a small percentage of demand.

David White, chief executive of Imutran, a Cambridge-based company which has produced pigs with human genes so that their organs would not be rejected when transplanted to humans, said that there is nothing to stop the company from beginning transplants to humans tomorrow. "But if we

did, we would be regarded as irresponsible. We have had a request from the Government not to proceed until the Kennedy report is published, and we have agreed." He added that almost two years ago, Imutran's research had shown the possibility of pig viruses crossing in a transplant to humans, and that it had informed the Kennedy committee and the US Food and Drug Administration. "The FDA is happy with our data, and for us to go ahead. We are really waiting for the Kennedy findings."

Suggestions of a cover-up were raised yesterday by a newspaper story which suggested

that the report's publication was delayed because ministers feared that genetic material known as "retroviruses" in pigs could cross over to humans and cause unknown diseases, while bypassing the body's defence systems.

But the Department of Health insisted yesterday that there has been no delay to the report's publication, following its delivery in the summer to the Secretary of State for Health, Stephen Dorrell. "The Government will publish its report sometime in the New Year, and we shall have to wait until then," said a spokesman.

One member of the Kennedy

advisory group, which included experts in genetics and ethics, also insisted yesterday that the report is in favour of allowing xenotransplantation, providing that adequate safeguards – including close monitoring of patients – are used.

The members are believed to have thought that using pigs' organs rather than those from monkeys or apes would reduce the risk of new diseases, because humans and pigs are further apart in evolutionary terms than primates such as baboons and chimpanzees, which are the other likely candidates for non-human organs.

Retroviruses are the genetic

codings for a virus which have become incorporated into an animal's own DNA. They have no harmful effect on the animal, and are found in every cell.

But if retroviruses cross to another species, they can have unpredictable effects. HIV, which causes Aids, is a retrovirus which originally came from monkeys. Other illnesses, including forms of influenza and bacterial infections, have passed from animals to humans. Clive Patience, of the Institute of Cancer Research, said "Basically, we have such early data on these retroviruses that we can't predict the effect it might have on patients." But a key ICR experiment had shown that pig retroviruses could grow in human cells.

Relax, drink and be merry ... it is all good for you

Glenda Cooper

Laughing is good for you. Drinking makes you laugh. Therefore drinking is good for you. It sounds like a theory dreamed up in a pub, but Dr Geoff Lowe, a psychologist from Hull, has three studies to prove it's true.

As the festive season gets into full swing, Dr Lowe will tell the British Psychological Society's conference in London that moderate drinking may benefit you because of its ability to make you laugh and relax, thus lowering stress levels and boosting the immune system.

Three separate studies organised by the University of Hull found that social drinkers laugh more than those who drink little or not at all. A survey of 332 people who defined themselves as "social drinkers" showed they used humour and laughter more in everyday life than lighter drinkers or teetotallers. They were more prepared to laugh out loud even if no one else found a joke amusing.

"These are people who regarded themselves as social drinkers and perhaps who do not drink more than 50 units a week," said Dr Lowe. One unit is defined as a glass of wine, a

small beer or a small serving of spirits.

A second experiment under laboratory conditions found that people drinking two bottles of Diamond White strong cider laughed 30 to 40 per cent more at the first twenty minutes of the film *Naked Gun* than those drinking non-alcoholic beer.

Researchers also observed how much young people laughed in bars and pubs in Hull, Leeds, Sheffield and York. Again a similar finding was that those drinking seemed to be having more fun.

"Unlike the earlier biological and medical studies which suggested that alcohol has a cardiological protective effect, our message is that maybe it is something to do with the person's lifestyle and attitude to life and the fact that they engage in fun and laughter more," Dr Lowe said.

"We are saying perhaps people shouldn't use alcohol as a medicine but only as a facilitator for fun and I believe that might be the important thing."

He said that this was not *cave blanche* for raiding the drinks cabinet however. "I wouldn't necessarily drink more as a basis of this research," he said. "I would laugh more."

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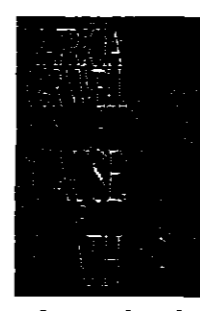
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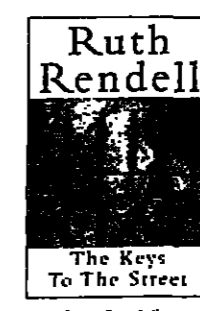
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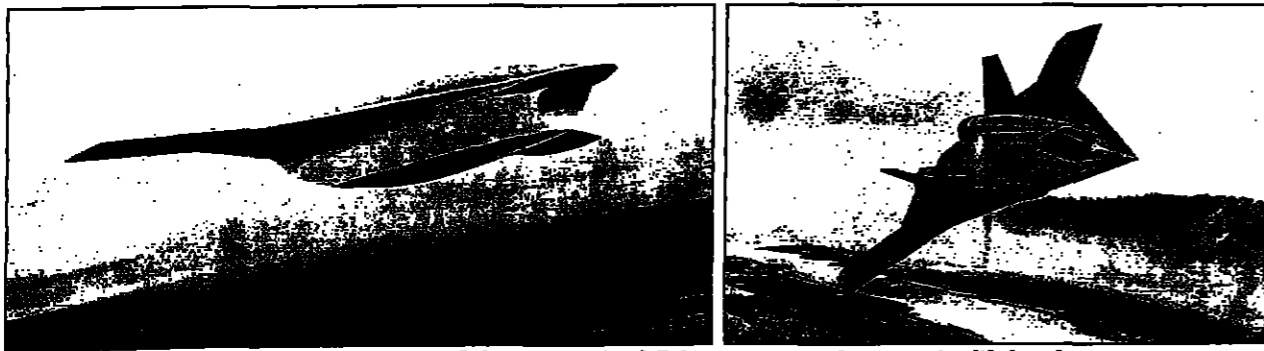
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Flights of fancy: An artist's impression of the uninhabited flying saucer and a new stealth bomber

Christopher Bellamy
Defence Correspondent

An "uninhabited" flying saucer – the MoD says "unmanned" – would be politically incorrect – is one of the options being examined to enable the RAF to attack distant targets into the middle of the next century.

Britain is to spend £35m looking at options for the Future Air Offensive System (FAOS). It could be an "uninhabited" plane, or an air-launched missile. Whatever it is, it will be stealthy and almost certainly have a virtual-reality cockpit – either in the plane itself, in another plane, or on the

ground. The new system, whatever it may be, is designed to replace the RAF's Tornado bombers in about 2015. "We are looking at something to do the job way into the next century," said a senior MoD source.

The Defence Procurement Minister, James Arbuthnot, told Parliament yesterday: "Study contracts to the value of £35m are expected to be placed in the new year. Options to be examined include variants of the Eurofighter and other new design and off-the-shelf combat aircraft; unmanned air vehicles; and stand-off air-to-ground missiles launched from transport aircraft.

"Collaborative options will be pursued."

Until now the US has maintained the lead in "stealth" technology, making aircraft nearly invisible to vision, radar, heat seeking and other forms of detection. But the principles of stealth technology are becoming widely understood and European aircraft designers are becoming increasingly expert at it. "The secrets of stealth are not so black as they were in the past", an RAF officer said, referring to the top-secret US "black programmes".

The new system is needed to attack targets at greater range than will be possible with the

Eurofighter – the RAF's other new aircraft due to enter service in 2002. The most traditional option is to extend the range and payload of the Eurofighter. But to do that, and make it more stealthy, might involve so many changes to the airframe that it would be more cost-effective to get a completely new plane, either from the US, or built in Europe.

That is the second option. The third is the uninhabited aircraft, which could return home and be re-armed. The fourth is a long-range air-launched missile, probably dropped from a transport plane, that would explode on impact.

Prince's guru dies aged 90

Clare Garner

Sir Laurens van der Post, the South African-born explorer, conservationist, writer and spiritual guru to the Prince of Wales, has died, just two days after his 90th birthday.

Sir Laurens' daughter, Lucia Crichton-Miller, said he had died peacefully at his home in Chelsea on Sunday night. A 90th birthday party, organised by the Prince of Wales, had been cancelled on Friday when Sir Laurens became unwell.

The Prince was said to be "very saddened" at the death of the close friend and adviser. Sir Laurens had been "a dear friend for a very long time".

Greenpeace hailed Sir Laurens as a man who had "inspired" people's interest in the exploration and protection of the natural world. A spokeswoman said: "His writings helped 20th century men and women retain a vision of nature, without which environmental protection will be the poorer."

Born on a bush farm in Orange Free State in 1906, Sir Laurens was the 13th child of 15. Although his first love was the South African wilderness, he spent his last 27 years in a

penthouse off the King's Road. His wife is reported to have told people: "Oh, my husband hasn't left Africa, he just lives in London." Sir Laurens himself said he lived here because there was "too much going on" in Africa that would have distracted him from his writing.

He wrote a total of 25 books. Although some are novels, he is best known for the mixed genre of travel, anthropology, and metaphysical speculation. His first book, *In a Province*, "the first written by a South African against racial prejudice", was published in 1934. His last, *The Admiral's Baby*, was published in September.

Sir Laurens described Prince Charles as "a man of vision, of many interests and gifts". He also admired, and acted as an adviser to, Baroness Thatcher. In 1981, he was knighted and, a year later, became godfather to Prince William.

Sir Laurens once said he would like to be remembered as "someone who tried to perform some service for what I think is the overall value in life – expressed by St Paul as charity. Without it no human being has any hope whatsoever".

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Schools could lose choice of exam boards

Lucy Ward
Education Correspondent

Schools could be banned from shopping around exam boards for a pick-and-mix of preferred syllabuses in an attempt to boost their results under proposals being considered by government curriculum advisers. Instead, schools could be forced to choose just one of three approved awarding bodies to cover all subjects.

The step is among a package of measures under discussion aimed at restoring flagging pub-

lic confidence in the consistency of standards across qualifications.

A powerful committee including the heads of the agencies overseeing academic and vocational qualifications, the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ), is examining the proposals, outlined in a paper seen by *The Independent*.

Gillian Shephard, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, highlighted concern over inconsistencies be-

tween syllabuses and exam boards earlier this month after the publication of a national study, "Standards Over Time", comparing standards in public exams over the last 20 years.

Although the report found no evidence that standards had fallen, Mrs Shephard said she wanted the four English exam boards and three vocational awarding bodies reduced in number to iron out inconsistencies.

The paper under consideration by the advisory committee acknowledges the "suspicion that standards are slowly – even

subconsciously – being eroded as awarding bodies compete for business amongst schools and colleges judged publicly by their examination results".

Schools and colleges anxious to boost their rating in exam league tables may be tempted to shop around for the easier syllabuses in an attempt to notch up higher grades, says the paper, while awarding bodies may consider lowering their standards "in a bid to improve their market share and prospects of survival".

The document includes a proposal to cut the number of awarding bodies to three.

Schools and colleges would then be made to choose one of the three bodies, ending the free market which allows individual subject departments to select their preferred syllabus. That proposal, if adopted, could cause deep dissent within institutions as subject departments battled for their preferred exam board.

George Urnbull of the Associated Examinations Board said: "You would certainly leave some teachers and departments

feeling dissatisfied. Whatever way you look at it this is taking away choice."

Another suggested change is greater cooperation between awarding bodies in the process of standards-setting to ensure consistency in questions and marking.

Mrs Shephard has said she will stop short of creating a single exam board, but the awarding bodies are deeply unhappy at the prospect of reform. They point out that their numbers have already been cut from 24 to four in under 10 years.

Ian Burrell

New research, revealed in *The Independent* in October shows that instant counselling sessions, where disaster victims are encouraged to talk about

Operational police work has been ranked alongside bomb

Ian Westwood, vice-chairman of the Police Federation, welcomed the recognition in the police service of the pressures that officers were under. He pointed out that police had also developed their own methods of reducing stress such as the black humour which was invariably used when describing traumatic operations to colleagues in the police canteen.



Stephen Goodwin
Heritage Correspondent

Stephen Goodwin
Heritage Correspondent

Further temptation will be unveiled this week at the Tower of London for the natural successors to Colonel Blood and the deranged woman who made a grab for the Imperial State Crown of George I in 1815.

For royal historians not seen by the public this century will go on display in the Martin Tower – the 1715 George I coronation crown, the Coronation Cross of King George IV (1821) and the Coronation Crown of Queen Adelaide (1831).

Alongside the George IV crown will be a £2.5m pile of 12,314 diamonds, lent by De Beers to represent the numbers of diamonds originally set in the crown.

The crown will be worn by its predecessors starting mining diamonds in South Africa in the

1800s, the gems were so costly that monarchs generally hired a set for their coronation. George IV faced a hire charge of £65,000.

The "Crown and Diamonds" permanent exhibition which opens to the public on Thursday is something of a homecoming. For 200 years the Martin Tower was known as the "Jewel Tower" because from 1669 the regalia were dis-

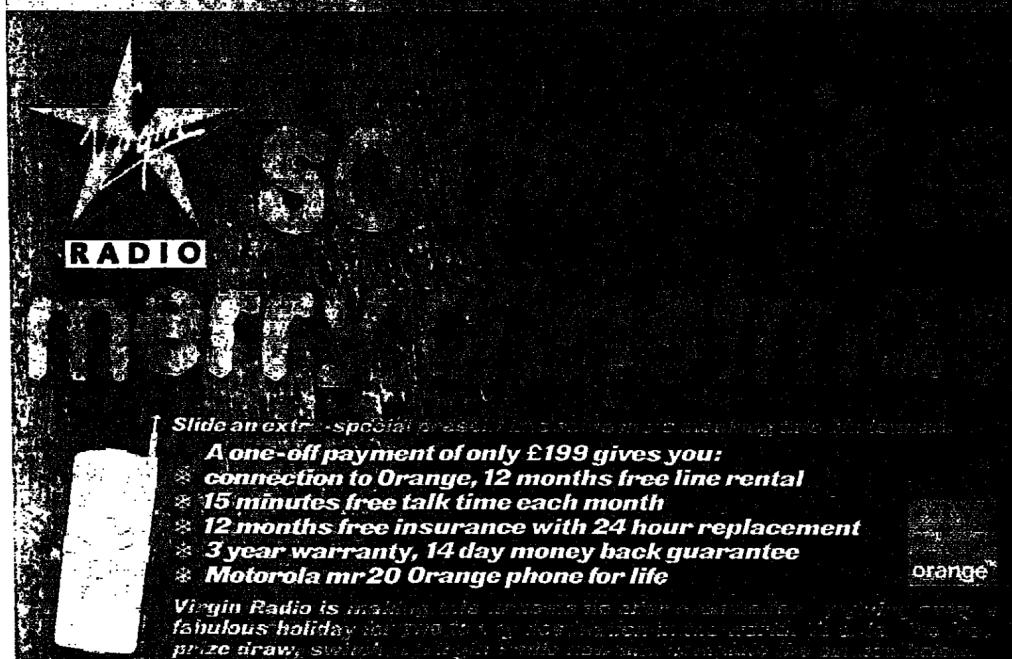
played in its lower chamber.

In 1671, the Tower was the scene of the only successful attempt to steal the Crown Jewels: Colonel Blood and his accomplices overwhelmed Keeper Talbot Edwards and seized the State Crown, Orb and Sceptre. They were caught attempting a getaway, but after a brief spell in the Tower, Blood was pardoned by Charles II.

The Imperial State Crown of

George IV was wrenched out of shape when a "deranged woman" tried to snatch it through a grille. It is the oldest surviving English state crown.

The three frames - discarded by the monarchy more than 100 years ago - were given back to the Queen's collection this year by Prince Jefri Bolkiah of Brunei who acquired them when he bought Asprey, the Bond Street jewellers.



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Glenda Cooper

At the end of a year when *The Independent* has campaigned for victims of child abuse to be given a voice, we would like you to support our Victims of Abuse appeal to help children whose lives have been devastated.

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Panic as Chinese markets crash



Mass market: Stock investors crowd a brokerage hall in Peking yesterday after market prices fell dramatically, would-be sellers also jammed telephone lines Photograph: Reuters

Teresa Poole
Shanghai

China's fledgling stockmarkets collapsed yesterday after a warning from the Communist Party that recent frenzied increases in share prices were "abnormal and irrational".

The *People's Daily*, in a front-page commentary, said: "The present overheated state of China's share markets makes us think of the stock crash in America in 1929."

The move was a rather clamorous version of what Alan Greenspan, the chairman of the US Federal Reserve, did to

American markets earlier this year. But as China moves closer to resuming sovereignty over Hong Kong - one of the world's most important financial centres - it will inevitably raise questions about the ability of Peking to handle modern capitalist institutions.

Within minutes of China's two exchanges opening for business in Shanghai and Shenzhen, most shares had dropped the full 10 per cent maximum allowed under a new rule which came into effect yesterday to limit daily movements. Panic-stricken small investors queued outside share-trading offices

around the country desperately trying to sell shares, but most were unable to offload their stock before trading was halted. In Shanghai, phones at stockbrokers were jammed with calls from would-be sellers.

"The government's cheated us," one man shouted to foreign reporters outside a Peking share-trading company, after failing to sell his shares.

The number of shareholders in China has doubled this year to more than 21 million. Most of the new investors entered the market over the past few months, enticed by soaring share prices. Losing money is a

new experience for them and the government's attempt to cool speculation also risks sparking a wave of anger among the smaller punters. Most market analysts expected further 10 per cent falls today and maybe again later this week.

Chinese investors are allowed to buy so-called "A" shares, which until the recent set-back had tripled since April in Shenzhen, and doubled in Shanghai. Over the past month, that boom had spurred a surge in hard-currency denominated "B" shares, which are officially restricted to foreign buyers, but are increasingly purchased

on the sly by local investors. Shanghai B shares had jumped 80 per cent since 11 November, and Shenzhen B shares about 100 per cent, before the nose-dive started.

The *People's Daily* article, trailed the night before on national television, warned investors that the government would not step in to help if the markets plunged. It told the public that the safest place to put its money was in the bank.

Many stockbrokers and analysts said the tone of the article was unduly harsh. "This is very, very disappointing and outrageous," said one.

The government experiment with stock exchanges, which started in 1990, has been deemed a success as Chinese companies were forced to produce increasingly accurate and regular financial statements, and could also use the market to raise funds for expansion. For investors it provided an alternative to bank savings especially when interest rates, as this year, were cut.

Peking (Reuters) - Chinese Premier Li Peng yesterday formally appointed shipping tycoon Tung Chee-hwa as the first post-colonial chief executive of Hong Kong.

Mandela joins summit on Zairean crisis

President Nelson Mandela of South Africa joined eight other leaders at a summit in Kenya on the crisis in the Great Lakes region but Zaire, the country at the heart of the conflict, stayed away. Its absence, apparently in protest at what it says is Rwandan and Ugandan support for a rebellion in the east, was a blow to hopes for progress. *Reuters - Nairobi*

Mafia bombing suspect found hanged in cell

Giuseppe Biondo, 39, a suspect in the 1992 assassination of anti-Mafia prosecutor Paolo Borsellino, was found hanging from a bedsheet in his cell, an apparent suicide. He was arrested last month on charges of supplying the remote-control device used to blow up Borsellino and five bodyguards. *AP - Caltanissetta, Sicily*

Bosnians fail to get home

Fewer than a third of the expected 870,000 Bosnians were able to return home in the first year of peace in the country, a UN-sponsored meeting heard. Sadako Ogata, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, said a big push should be made to increase the flow of refugees back next spring as long as it was safe, even if they wanted to stay in host countries. "Involuntary return is not excluded," she said. *AP - Geneva*

100 killed in Somali clash

Rival factions fought for a third day running in the Somali capital, taking the death-toll to nearly 100 in the clashes between the forces of Hussein Aided and Osman Hassan Ali Atto. *Reuters - Mogadishu*

Corsican hard man gives up

Francois Santoni, Corsica's best-known headline separatist leader, surrendered hours after police arrested his woman friend. He heads the legal wing of the outlawed FLNC-Canal Historique, held responsible for dozens of bomb attacks. *Reuters - Ajaccio*

Hit-squad claim resurfaces

A Spanish paper published leaked papers purporting to prove the former Socialist administration set up death-squads which waged a "dirty war" against Eta Basque rebels in the 1980s. *Reuters - Madrid*

Minister quits in Stasi row

Grete Faremo, Norway's Oil and Energy Minister, resigned over a scandal in which the intelligence service sought information from files of the former East German Stasi security police on an investigator, Berge Furre, a former left-wing politician. *Reuters - Oslo*

Dictator escapes death sentence

The death sentence on the former president Chun Doo Hwan, imposed for a 1979 coup and massacre of demonstrators, was commuted to life imprisonment. As the former military dictator was led out of the Seoul Appellate Court, cries of "Murderer!" and screams of outrage rang out as opponents voiced their disbelief. *AP - Seoul*

Russian soldiers sell blood

The Russian military is so dispirited and impoverished that officers have been forced to sell their blood to afford basic necessities, the Defence Minister, Igor Rodionov, said in an interview. *Reuters - Moscow*

Turks pour cold water on Rifkind's Cyprus mission

Tony Barber
Nicosia

The Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, expressed hope yesterday that 1997 could be the year for a breakthrough in the Cyprus dispute, but quickly ran into opposition from the Turkish Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktaş.

Mr Denktaş told him that the Turkish Cypriots wanted to treat next year as "a year of opportunity for settling the Cyprus problem" but that the issue should not be linked to Cyprus's application to join the European Union.

"Cyprus's membership of the EU should be a matter for a referendum after the Cyprus problem has been solved," Mr Denktaş said. His remarks appeared to be a rebuff to Britain and other EU countries which are hoping to use Cyprus's membership bid as way of accelerating progress towards settlement.

Mr Rifkind, the first British Foreign Secretary for more than



Malcolm Rifkind: Warning over military build-up

30 years to make an official visit to Cyprus, held separate talks with Mr Denktaş and Glafcos Clerides, the president of the internationally recognised government of Cyprus.

"As one looks at the issues, one is conscious that they are difficult but they are not insuperable," Mr Rifkind said. "I think that there is real scope for progress and that 1997 ought to be the year in which perhaps a breakthrough will be made."

However, he warned that with 30,000 Turkish troops on Cyprus and a military build-up taking place in the Greek Cypriot-controlled south, there was a grave danger that further militarisation of the island could prevent diplomatic progress. "The amount of military hardware... is dangerously high," he said.

United Nations peace-keeping troops said there had been a noticeable rise in tensions in the UN-patrolled buffer zone on the island since last summer, when the worst clashes since 1974 broke out between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. One UN officer said there were at least two to three incidents every day, sometimes involving shooting.

Mr Clerides said he was willing to enter into direct talks next year with Mr Denktaş, for the first time since 1994, but that such negotiations would have to be well prepared. Among the key issues are those of sovereignty, security and territorial exchanges.

Mr Clerides insists Cyprus must be a single state with

undivided sovereignty for international purposes, but Mr Denktaş wants to retain sovereignty for his self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus which no country except Turkey recognises. Mr Clerides also wants international security guarantees for Cyprus included in a settlement, and a return to Greek Cypriot rule of some parts of the northern third of the island seized by Turkish forces in 1974.

The basic framework for a settlement - a bizonal, bicomunal federation with guaranteed rights for both sides - is already in place. But Mr Rifkind said: "You cannot reverse thirty years of disappointments overnight."

A senior adviser to Mr Clerides said that the key to successful talks next year lay with Turkey just as much as with Mr Denktaş.

There must be a spirit of give and take," he said. "Mr Denktaş will not move from his known positions unless Ankara encourages him to do so."

Netanyahu set to lift siege of Ramallah as talks resume

Eric Silver
Jerusalem

Israel and the Palestinians are to resume negotiations this week on Hebron, the last West Bank town still under occupation, but there was little optimism on either side yesterday that they would reach early agreement on the scheduled redeployment of Israeli troops.

The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, told parliament in Jerusalem that he was still waiting for Palestinian counter-proposals. He indicated, however, that Israel would soon lift the siege imposed on the West Bank town of Ramallah after Palestinian gunmen shot dead a mother and child driving to a nearby settlement last Wednesday.

The decision to return to the negotiating table was taken during a 10-minute telephone conversation on Sunday night between Mr Netanyahu and the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat. But Haneen Ashrawi, a Palestinian minister who was present when Mr Arafat telephoned the Prime Minister, told foreign correspondents yesterday that the prospects were still very bad.

"They've been meeting ad nauseam," she said. "When there are talks, there is no substance and there are no results." The question was whether there was the political will on the Israeli side - and whether the United States was ready to take its mediating role seriously.

The Israelis, for their part, blame the Palestinians for need-

lessly dragging out the Hebron talks and accuse them of inciting a new round of violence. The Palestinians' main concern is to ensure that the Likud government completes the rest of the interim peace accord after pulling out of Hebron.

Under an agreement reached with the previous Labour government, Israeli troops were supposed to have redeployed in March, but the withdrawal was postponed after an epidemic of suicide bombings inside Israel by Islamic militants. Israel wants to enhance the security of the 450 settlers living in the centre of Hebron among 150,000 Arabs. The Palestinians insist the terms cannot be renegotiated. Only their implementation, they say, is open to discussion.

The Palestinians are also de-

manding that Mr Netanyahu drop plans to expand Jewish settlements on the West Bank and Arab East Jerusalem. Dr Ashrawi yesterday condemned last Friday's decision to restore incentives for settlers to make their homes there. "Land for peace," she said, "is the very essence of the peace process."

Washington seems to agree, and is urging Mr Netanyahu to think again. Three former secretaries of state - James Baker, Lawrence Eagleburger and Cyrus Vance - appealed to him yesterday not to jeopardise all that had been achieved over two decades of peacemaking. "Such a tragic result," they wrote, "will threaten the security of Israel, the Palestinians and friendly Arab countries, and will damage US interests in the Middle East."

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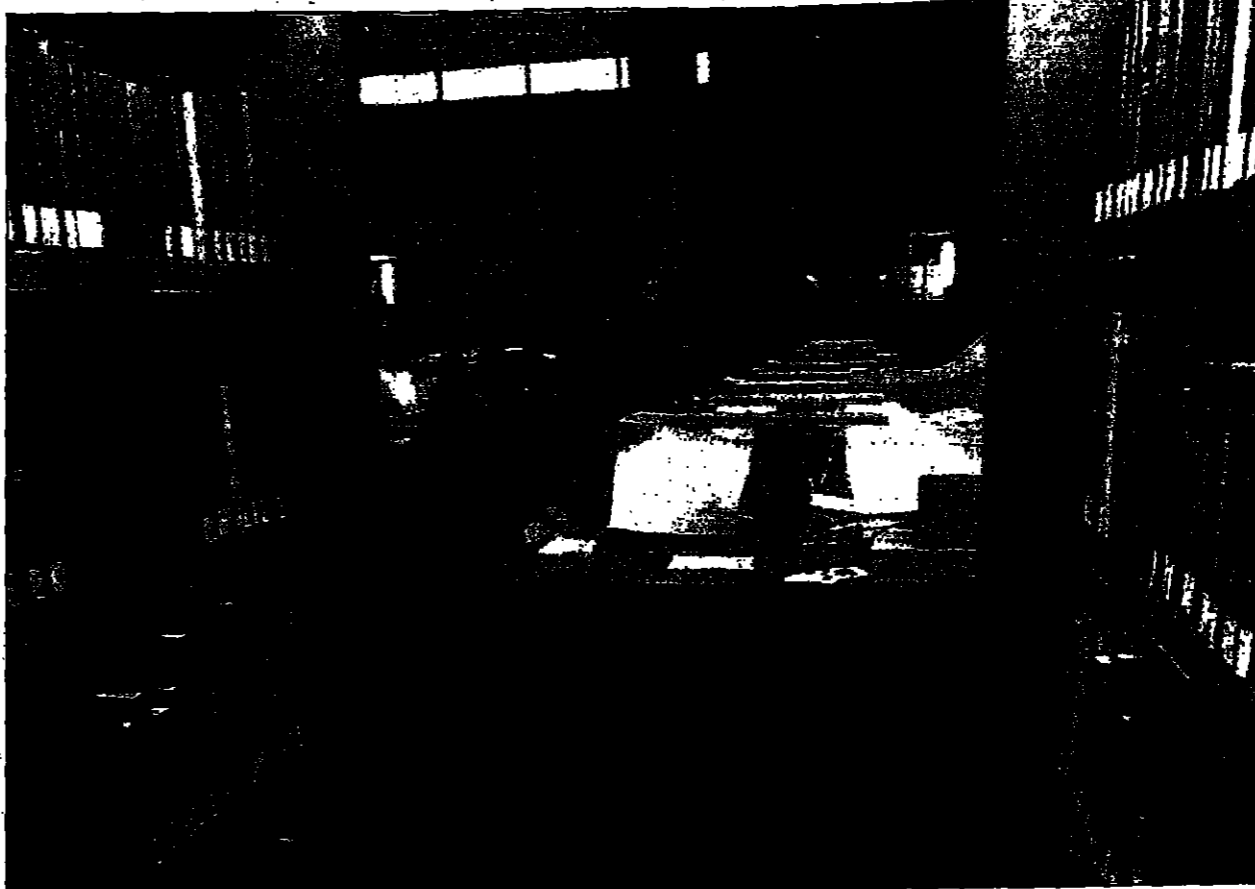
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international

France's brand new national library: a fitting tribute to a president or folie des grandeurs?



Mise en Seine: Two visitors passing the Bibliothèque Nationale, which President Chirac will officially open tonight. The building, comprising four L-shaped grey towers, is meant to represent open books



Photograph: Reuters

Mary Dejevsky

Paris

It was conceived as the "biggest and most modern library in the world". As its four towers grew out of the urban wasteland by the Seine, it was scornfully referred to by Parisians as the Très Grande Bibliothèque (very big library) or TGB, a play on the name of the country's super-fast inter-city express, the TGV (Train à Grand Vitesse), a name which has stuck.

Now, its enemies say, it is a white elephant, old before it is fully finished; its friends laud it as a modern asset for a modern city. But from this evening, when President Chirac performs the official opening before a crowd of national celebrities and city dignitaries, it will be the François Mitterrand Library, the national library of France, and the second biggest library in the world after the US Library of Congress.

Yesterday, however, less than

24 hours before the official opening, this great national project seemed far from finished. Workmen were hammering, painting and wiring in the depths of the broad, wood-lined corridors. As the library's chairman, Jean Favier, and its architect, Dominique Perrault, shepherded groups around the inaugural exhibition on encyclopaedism, trade union representatives put on a rival show to complain about inadequate safety facilities and staffing.

It was an appropriate conflict to herald the library's opening. Everything about the project has been controversial since the late President Mitterrand announced it on the first Bastille Day of his second term in office (1988). Everything, that is, except its purpose. Existing national library facilities were universally acknowledged to be inadequate; even academicians had to queue from early morning to get a seat and no one knew exactly how many books

Scale of two cities' grandiose plans for a national centre of learning



Mitterrand: Civic memorial

BIBLIOTHEQUE NATIONALE

Announced: By President Mitterrand 14 July 1988. Building started in 1991. Mitterrand opened bare buildings on 30 March 1995, shortly before end of his second term. Completed: Public areas completed December 1996. Today, President Chirac officially opens library. On 20 December, first areas open to public. Capacity: Originally designed to hold five million volumes, but it was soon decided that this was far too few. It will start with 10 million and will eventually be able to accommodate 30 million. Cost: Fr8bn (£950m). Size: 7.5 hectares (18.5 acres).

it possessed. For a country that regards itself as highly cultivated the need for a new library was unquestioned. The French were also much impressed with the American practice of outgoing presidents founding libraries.

But that is where the agreement stopped. Mr Mitterrand

saw his project as providing state-of-the-art library facilities for all. But experts asked whether storing great numbers of books might be a thing of the past, given the widespread use of computers. The library now combines on-line facilities with the national library collection.

THE BRITISH LIBRARY

Announced: In 1978 by the then Secretary of State for Education, Shirley Williams. Building work began in 1982. Architect Colin St John Wilson has been working on the design since 1982. Completed: The first books were moved in on 2 December 1996. Readers will be admitted in November 1997. The library will not be fully open until June 1999. Capacity: Scholars demanded capacity for 25 million volumes. However, because of cuts, there is now only room for 12 million. Cost: Shirley Williams's original budget was £116m. It now stands at £511m. Size: 13 acres.



Williams: Initiated project

Then there was the design. It is a gigantic rectangle, with towers at the four corners in the shape of open books. A central courtyard with pine trees provides space for "contemplation". Criticisms have ranged from "compact and cold" to "monumental on an inhuman

scale". Distances are huge, prompting questions about how long it will take to obtain a book. Vast staircases lead to the entrance, leading one local resident to ask how anyone but the hardest would make the climb. Supporters of the building say that the design had to be adapted

to the demands of a library. The towers were planned to be transparent and to accommodate the book stacks - but the glass is now dulled by wooden blinds to keep out the sunlight and protect the books.

When it was decided that the building would house the national library collection in addition to new facilities, capacity had to be increased from five million to more than 10 million volumes. The towers had to be reinforced to carry the weight, and their height reduced from 100m to 90m. This, say some, makes the ensemble less impressive - or, to quote another local resident: "they're not beautiful, not ugly, just squat."

The location, in a godforsaken wasteland of eastern Paris was also questioned. An urban development plan was supposed to revive the whole area, but this has since been pared down and is now frozen. A new metro line was planned to link the library site with the city centre, but this will not be ready now until the summer of 1998 at the earliest. So it stands, wind-swept and alone, awaiting its first readers. The public reference rooms will open their doors on Friday. The specialist research section, however, on the "garden floor" will not be completed until 1998.

Since last year, when the interior was a cold, empty shell, that looked more like a theatre for totalitarian rallies than a library, there has been progress. The computers are (mostly) wired up, there are books of open shelves and there is a massive tapestry, designed by Roy Lichtenstein, in the main hall.

But when he pronounces the edifice "the François Mitterrand library", Mr Chirac will be delivering a backhanded compliment. Whether it becomes a flourishing cultural centre or a lavish eccentricity, as its opponents believe, it will forever bear the late president's name.

Malcolm Bradbury, page 13

Cross-Channel sibling has kept to the storyline

The new British Library may not be much outside, but it is a better building, writes Jonathan Glancey

Dominique Perrault's library is a structural *tour de force*, an architectural conundrum and not a very pleasant place to be. Dwarfed, the visitor climbs 36 narrow and steep steps from the street to reach a prairie-like plaza marked on its four corners by four identical and vertiginous L-shaped glass towers. Books are stacked in these, shaded from daylight by a web of wooden louvres.

If it seems perverse to house precious books in sky-scraping glass towers, it is Perrault's has courted controversy with a design that must have looked on being on the drawing-board, but is quite batty in practice. It seems even stranger, having climbed up to the library's great podium, to be forced downstairs and underground to find the reading rooms. Stairs, escalators and lifts lead down to corridors that seem infinitely long (180 yards in fact) and daunting. These lead to a long sequence of grey concrete "salons", each lined in all but inreplaceable African veneers: there is no end to the electronic retrieval of information, a sense of what a library is there for. A library, as the French have obviously agreed, is much more than a storehouse of books. If it is no more than that, then both the French and the British

might have built giant warehouses somewhere along their national motorway networks and connected them to subscribers via the Internet.

No, great libraries are built as evident symbols of national culture and the long accumulation of great learning and books and manuscripts that are often lovely to the touch as well as fascinating to read. They are places to meet, to watch other people and to bask in the virtual presence of those great minds that have sat and studied as we sit and study; virtual minds because these are with us in libraries, stacked in volumes that line miles of shelves.

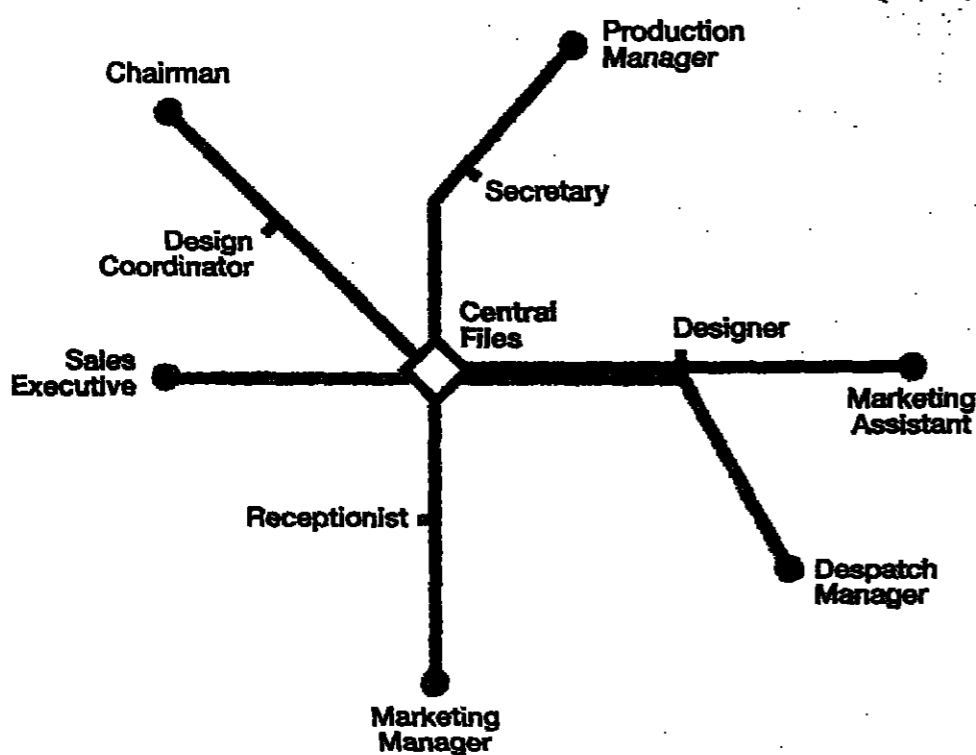
The sheer tactile quality of the spaces and rooms inside the British Library will bring their own reward when the great reading public discovers them in the next year or three. The British Library is a building we will come to respect, if not to love, whilst Perrault's Très Grande Bibliothèque (TGB) is in danger of neither being loved nor respected. It is too clever a design by half, too

daunting and too wasteful of rare and endangered hardwoods to win our minds, let alone our hearts.

In urban-planning terms, too, the British Library is, despite its bulk, the gentler of the two buildings. Its location between Euston and St Pancras and King's Cross stations will ensure that its readers arrive by public transport. The TGB is a horrid place to arrive on a wet and windy day, not least because its concealed entrances can only be reached after a climb up the stairs of the podium and a trek across its exposed top.

If you think either of these monumental national libraries not a little mad, consider the case of the up-and-coming new £170m library at Alexandria: a giant cylinder rising above the city's eastern harbour, its foundations are being dug deep into the water. Books and water: a sound basis for a library?

Perhaps we can work more effectively from home at computer screens, but libraries, especially grand libraries, are as much places of research as they are of civic romance and cultural pride. Criticise them by all means, but secretly, those of us who love the quiet and secret drama of major libraries will be bagging our seats - in Paris from today, in London, from 2000.



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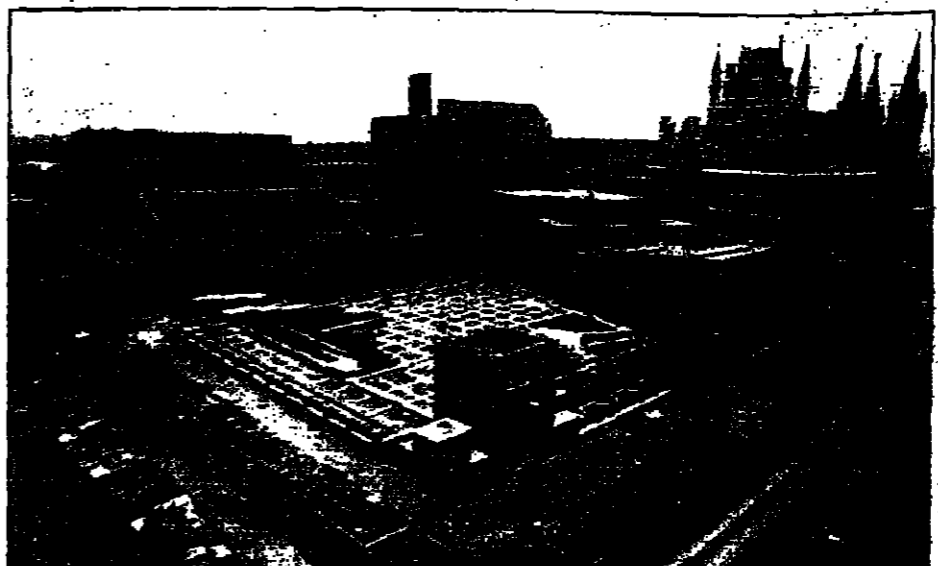
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User-friendly: The new British Library which, in contrast to its counterpart in Paris, has good communication links and exudes more of a sense of what a library is for

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Clinton's 'rabid dog' sinks his jaws into Whitewater

Rupert Cornwell
Washington

They could hardly be more different: the cool, pin-striped Republican prosecutor, and the ranting, bluejean-clad Democrat political consultant. And now Kenneth Starr and James Carville are adversaries in a battle that would be comic were the stakes not so high — Mr Starr's independent counsel investigation of President Bill Clinton and the First Lady.

Throughout a recent career which has taken him from a key role in Mr Clinton's 1992 election campaign to a marriage with an equally belligerent Republican political operative, Mary Matalin, Mr Carville has always had the knack of getting himself talked about. Rarely though has he generated as much verbiage as now.

Hardly was the 1996 election over than he embarked on a new mission: an unholy war against Mr Starr, held by Mr Carville to be an ambitious, self-seeking Republican bent on bringing down the Clinton presidency by fair means or foul. To stop that happening, the con-

sultant announced he was setting up an organisation to attack Mr Starr.

The reaction was predictable: media and political uproar, accusations that Mr Carville's campaign against an independent federal prosecutor amounted to an obstruction of justice — all fuelled by Mr Clinton's reluctance to publicly disavow his quarrelsome former aide. In fact, the presidential silence was predictable, given Mr Clinton's complaints that Mr Starr was "out to get him".

Ms Matalin was not going to let a happy marriage get in the way of some old-fashioned Democrat-bashing. Her husband, she told Fox TV, was "a frothing, rabid dog", acting as a front man for the President. To which Mr Carville commented: "I went home and bit her."

Obscured by this vaudeville is an issue that increasingly troubles constitutional experts and less partisan politicians: that the institution of the special counsel, set up to cope with the unique case of Watergate, had been devalued and turned into a cheap party political weapon.



Dogged loyalty: James Carville, his wife Mary Matalin and baby. After her TV attack he 'went home and bit her' Photograph: K Campbell/Liaison

Opinions are mixed on the merits of the Carville enterprise. For some, an overdue spotlight has been turned on a process that no longer works; others argue that his partisan antics have only obscured the issue and delayed real reform.

Even Archibald Cox, the Watergate special prosecutor fired by President Nixon in 1973, be-

lieves the system must be changed by limiting such investigations to a tiny handful of the country's topmost officials and to offences committed in office — not, as in the case of Whitewater, to events back in Arkansas a decade or more before Mr Clinton entered the White House. As well as the President, three other past and

present Cabinet officers are the object of prosecutions, also for alleged wrongdoing that does not remotely measure up to Watergate.

Like almost every other critic of the system, Mr Cox advocates strict restrictions to prevent open-ended "fishing expeditions". The Whitewater probe, for instance, has already

lasted three years (longer than Watergate) and cost some \$25m (£16m), yet no charges have been levelled against Mr Clinton. Several of those who have been tried and convicted were punished for crimes only distantly related to the land deal "scandal".

Mr Starr, meanwhile, continues imperturbably about his

business. Nobody beyond his staff, and certainly not Mr Carville, knows when, or even if, further indictments will come. It is considered unlikely, however, that he would press charges against Mrs Clinton, let alone her husband, without overwhelming proof of guilt on an issue that ordinary Americans can understand.

Women still face abuse at US 'male citadel'

Rupert Cornwell

Barely a year after it was forced to admit women for the first time, the Citadel military college in Charleston, South Carolina, has suspended a cadet and three student officers for the alleged "hazing" — systematic humiliation — of two first year female cadets.

In a case which now involves both the state police and the FBI, the women — among four currently enrolled at the Citadel — were sprayed with inflammable liquid and their clothes set on fire. Neither was injured in the incident, but the two had previously suffered threats of violence and physical abuse, college officials said.

Such "hazing" is technically against college rules. In fact, however, the practice is ingrained in the culture of an institution which always prided itself on the supposedly character-forming qualities of the harsh treatment inflicted on new entrants in their first year. But in 1995 the traditions of a century and a half were turned in their head, when the state-supported Citadel bowed to a Supreme Court decision that its previous men-only policy was unconstitutional. After a two year legal struggle, Shannon Faulkner, the woman who had brought the original case against the college, was admitted as a resident, full-time cadet.

Although she dropped out after just five days, complaining of the strain and isolation of being the only woman, four more enrolled in 1996. They parade and study with their male counterparts, but live in separate quarters and have been excused some of the physically toughest training disciplines. The FBI has been brought in because the two cadets' civil rights may have been violated.

According to a Citadel spokesman, the women did not initially report the clothes-burning incident, which took place a month ago, to the college authorities. But now that a probe has belatedly begun, more suspensions could be on the way, officials said.

America's parents possessed by Elmo mania

David Usborne
New York

It's official: the 1996 Christmas Craze Award in the kiddies' toy category (United States and Canada) is awarded to a stuffed toy in deep crimson with bug eyes and bright nose recognisable to fans of *Sesame Street* as Elmo. Only this guy likes to have his tummy rubbed and goes by "Tickle Me Elmo".

This furry stroke of marketing brilliance has amply measured up to the award's usual high standards.

With eight days until Christmas, it is absolutely unavailable and the mere mention of it triggers general hysteria. Past winners have included Cabbage Patch Dolls, Transformers and Power Rangers.

A runner-up this year (as this frustrated correspondent and fa-

ther can confirm) is the Talking Woody doll made popular by the film *Toy Story*. Buzz Lightyear dolls (winner, United Kingdom), by contrast, are an easy find here.

Tickle Me Elmo's performance is this: tickle it once and it giggles, tickle a second time and you hear: "Oh no, that tickles". Indulge your sadistic impulses for a third tickle and the doll vibrates and squeals.

The toy has captured the requisite rush of media attention. Whose pen-portrait graced the front page of the *Wall Street Journal's* Marketplace section yesterday? Tickle Me Elmo's. It is a serious commodity, after all, that is priced at \$29 (£18) but can be sold at over a grand.

A fresh story of Elmo-mania lands almost daily. At the weekend, an assistant in a Wal-Mart superstore in Canada ended up

in hospital after being trampled at 3 o'clock in the morning by some 300 frenzied parents attracted by a middle-of-the-night special Elmo sale.

Last week, the news wires bombarded us with the Florida grandmother who paid \$3,500 for a single Tickle Me Elmo in a live auction held by her local radio station. The woman had no child in mind that might want the doll, but, like all Americans

by now, she knew she simply had to have one. In New York, mothers have been seen chasing toy lorries in case fresh Elmo supplies are concealed within. In Britain, Selfridges had 40 but one American bought them immediately.

The toy's maker, Tyco, is, shall we say, tickled. It originally planned production of about 300,000 dolls but has now upped that to one million.

Litter laws sweep LA drug dealers off the streets

Tim Cornwell
Los Angeles

Prosecutors in Los Angeles, in their latest attempt to break the power of the city's gangs, have rolled out a novel legal weapon: they are suing gang members in civil court for everything from loitering to littering.

There is no prospect of wringing damages from the Crips or the Bloods. But sympathetic judges are granting injunctions that proscribe a wide range of gang activities, and have effectively given police broad new powers of arrest.

Los Angeles, like many major American cities, has seen a significant drop in its murder rates in the last two years. But gang killings now account for nearly half the homicides in LA County and are among the most difficult to solve. One rising power is the 18th Street gang, a cross-racial gang with a loose-knit membership estimated at 20,000 and linked to 154 killings in the last decade.

Thirteen alleged leaders of the Mexican mafia, la Eme (the M) are on trial in a Los Angeles court. La Eme, which started as a prison gang, is said to

have taken control of several hundred Hispanic street gangs, levying "taxes" on drug sales.

Fresh evidence of the gangs' criminal clout has driven new efforts in places like Pasadena, on the north-eastern edge of the city, where the Pasadena Denver Lanes gang, a Blood offshoot, until recently held sway.

Local prosecutors sued and won an injunction against 35 "PDL" members, naming them as a "public nuisance". It barred them from riding bikes, carrying papers, cellular phones, and two way radios. Other injunctions have banned the wearing

of gang colours, loitering and drinking in the street.

Earlier this autumn, three dozen members of the Lennox 13 gang in central Los Angeles were roused from their beds at 5am by police officers. Probably expecting to be hauled off in handcuffs, they were served with a 400-sheet stack of legal documents. "They were dazed and confused," said Kevin Ross, the prosecutor who obtained an injunction in the Lennox case. "They understand what it is to be arrested for shooting someone. This was something they had no idea how to react to."

McDonald's serves up a slice of history

Downey, California (AP) — Customers lined up before sunrise for the first burgers, fries and shakes served by the newly restored, oldest McDonald's restaurant in the world.

The eatery — restored to its original red and white tiles and "Speedee" sign — was first opened on 18 August 1953, but was closed in 1994 because of damage from an earthquake.

The neon Speedee, a smiling chef perched atop a 60-foot-tall arch, was a source of civic pride in the community 15 miles southeast of Los Angeles. Preservationists battled to save the landmark, and the company eventually gave in and dropped its plans to close it.

"We wanted to do the right thing for the community of Downey and out of respect for our heritage," said Jeff Schwartz, a regional vice president for McDonald's Corp.

Like the original, it has no indoor seating. There is outdoor seating for 100. A campaign to preserve the stand gained steam in 1994, when the National Trust for Historic Preservation declared it one of the country's 11 most endangered landmarks and "an authentic icon of contemporary American life."

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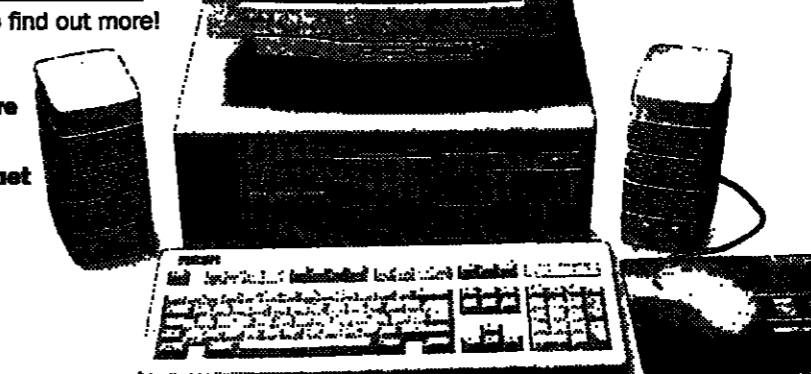
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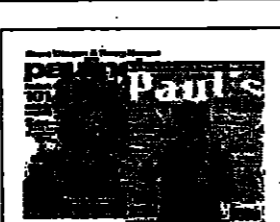


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Labour

A detailed black and white illustration of an elephant, shown in profile facing left. The elephant has a large, textured body, a prominent trunk, and a small tusk. It is standing on a simple ground line.



Van der Post: 'I have tried to take no heed of the morrow – not in an irresponsible way, but as an act of trust in a life given in trust.'


Photograph: Glynn Griffith

'In India and the East the elephant is a symbol of wisdom, of the triumph of co-operation between the natural and the calculated in man. In the Bushman's world it was not so. The elephant was to him what the one-eyed titans were to Odysseus - images of the exaggeration and excess from which his spirit had to free itself if it were ever to become symmetrical and whole. So he made war on the elephants' - from *The Heart of the Hunter*, 1961, drawing by Maurice Wilson

In all, he wrote 26 books, including *The Heart of the Hunter* (1961) and *The Seed and the Sower* (1963) and finished a volume of an autobiography earlier this year, *The Admiral's Baby*, which told of the 22 months he spent in Java after his release from the Japanese prisoner-of-war camp.

His role and place in life,

I remember our final meeting. As usual, there was the fragrance of the bouquet of freesias in his study, as well as the friendly beckoning of the mantis - the Bushman god -



Rock painting of women on the marsh, one apparently with grubbing stick in hand – from *The Heart of the Hunter*

rens van der Post always recommended that we should never cease to obey and follow the pattern set by the great myths such as Odysseus or the quest for the Holy Grail if we

All his family members and friends have one certainty at heart — that Sir Laurens, before going back to light, and, like the hunter in the Bushman story, grasped, at last, one feather of the Great White Bird of truth in his outworn fingers.

Jean-Marc Pottier

Laurens Jan van der Post, writer, explorer, soldier, explorer, conservationist: born Philipolis, South Africa 13 December 1906; CBS radio 1947; KJ 1981: books include In a Province 1934, Venture to the Interior 1952, A Bar of Shadow 1952, The Face Beside the Moon 1953, Flamingo Feather 1953, The Dark Eye in Africa 1953, Creative Pattern in Primitive Man 1956, The Lost World of the Kalahari 1958, The Heart of the Hunter 1961, The Seed and the Sower 1963, Journey into Russia 1964, A Portrait of all the Russias 1967, The Hunter and the Whale 1967, A Portrait of Japan 1968, The Night of the New Moon 1970, A Story like the Wind 1972, A Far Off Place 1974, A Mantis Carol 1975/3, Jung and the Story of Our Time 1977, Yet Being Someone Other 1982, The Voice of the Thunder 1993, married 1928 Marjorie Wendi (died 1995; one daughter and one son deceased; marriage dissolved), 1949 Ingeborg Gifford (died London 15 December 1996).

Wilf Carter

Grand Marshal of the famous Calgary Stampede. Although semi-retired, Wilf Carter continued to tour into the 1990s.

Paul Wadey

Wilf Arthur Charles Carter, singer, guitarist and songwriter: born Port Hillford, Nova Scotia **18 December 1904; married 1936 Bobbie Bryan (died 1989; two daughters); died** Scottsdale, Arizona **5 December 1996.**



Carter: yodelling
 Photograph: British Archive of
 Country Music

Passengers held by Iraqis cannot sue BA

LAW REPORT

17 December 1996

The passengers had been on a scheduled flight, BA149, from London to Kuala Lumpur by way of Kuwait and Madras. It was said that BA should have known its passengers would be at severe risk if the aircraft were to land in Kuwait after hostilities had begun.

(known as Sykes) appealed against a decision of an Extra Division of the Inner House of the Court of Session (1996 SLT 529) upholding a decision of Lord Ordinary, Lord Marnoch, on 20 December 1993, dismissing the pursuer's claim for damages for breach of an implied term of her contract with RA that it would take

Lord Hope said the Convention should be given a purposive construction. What it sought to achieve was a uniform international code, which could be applied by the courts of the contracting states without reference to the rules of their own domestic law. In the areas with which the Convention dealt, one of which was the liability

Therefore any remedy not provided by the Convention was excluded. Domestic courts were not free to provide a remedy according to their own law, because that would undermine the Convention and distort the operation of the whole scheme.

Lectures

National Gallery: Lynda Stephens, "Crucifix" (oil); Judith and Her Sister, 1 pm.
Vanderbilt and Albert Museum: Louise Loefer, "Fairness", 2:30 pm.
Tate Gallery: Juvine Hopkins, "Visions of the Real World" (1); the Pre-Raphaelites", 1 pm.
British Museum: Barbara Friend, "Is-lama: Architecture in Burkhaara and Samarkand", 1:15 pm.
National Portrait Gallery: Alfred Barnes and Susan Morris, "An Eighteenth-Century Collation: Words of wit and wisdom", 1:30 pm.

ROYAL ENGAGEMENTS

The Prince of Wales, Patron, College of Occupational Therapists, opens the new Occupational Therapists Institute at the Mansel-Thorpe, London SW1. The Duke of Kent attends the Path to the Future Conference at the State Apartments, St James's Palace, London SW1. Princess Alexandra attends a 'Day in the World' at Greenham Common at the Young Albert Hall, London SW7. Princess Michael of Kent attends the 'Sunlight Foundation' 'Café Service' at St Luke's, Chelsea, London SW1.

Birthdays

Mr Simon Bates, disc jockey, 40; Mr Peter Blackburn, chairman and chief executive, Nestlé UK, 56; Dame Mary Cartwright, mathematician, 40; Mr Christopher Carenov, actor, 51; Viscount Davenport, Lord-Lieutenant of Warwickshire, 73; Lord de Villiers, barrister, 85; Lord de Vries, former governor, 85; Mr John Dymally, radio presenter, 59; Mr Bernard Hill, actor, 52; The Hon Dominic Lawson, Editor, *Sunday Telegraph*, 40; Mr Kerry Packer, chairman, Consolidated Press Holdings, 59; Sir Leonard Peach, chairman, Police Complaints Authority, 64; Mr Robert Robinson, broadcaster and writer, 60; Mr David Ross, actor, 60; Mr John Rennie, MP, 62; Mr Tommy Steele, singer and actor, 60; Professor William Stewart, former Vice-Chancellor of Keele University, 81; Sir Cecil Walker MP, 72.

Anniversaries

Birbhs: Gabrielle-Émilie Le Tonnelier de Breteuil, 1706; Jean-Baptiste Girard, priest and educator, 1765; Ludwig van Beethoven, composer, baptized 1780; François-Marie Granet, painter, 1771; Sir Humphry Davy, chemist and inventor, 1778; Sir George Hayter, painter, 1792; Jules-Alfred Hout de Gomeret, novelist and historian, 1830; Fod Mades Fon (Fod Hermann Huelfer), novelist, 1857; Erskine Preston Caldwell, novelist, 1903; Walter Greenwood, novelist and playwright, 1902; Stanley Raymond (Ray) Noble, composer and conductor, 1903; Willard Frank Poreby, chemist, 1908. Death: Poreby.

Gregory VII,

[illegible]

English-Speaking Union

The following appointments have been announced by the English-Speaking Union:

Honorary Treasurer: Mr Christopher McLaren. Governors: Lady Dean, Mrs Veronica McVey. Sir Alistair Grant, Lord Gilmore of Thamesfield. Mr John Gough. Miss Victoria Legge-Bourke. Admiral Sir Richard Thomas. Mr Grant Carson. Mr Robin Clarke.

Appointments

Sir Richard Luce, to be Governor of Gibraltar.
Mr Harman John Leslie, to be a Queen's Bench Master of the Supreme Court, Queen's Bench Division.
Col David H. Hills, to be Under Treasurer of Lincoln's Inn.

Church appointments

The following appointments have been announced by the Church of England:

The Rev David James, Vicar of St Mary with St Edward and St Luke, and Rural Dean of Walsham Forest (Chichester) to be also a Non-Residential Canon of Chichester

The Rev David Cowie, Vicar of St Mary de Castro, Leicester. Chapter of Trinity Hospital, Leicester and the Sovereign's Privy Counsellor, Newcastle, to be also Ministerial with special personal responsibility for St Michael's Church, and Honorary Team Vicar within the Holy Spirit Team Ministry, Leicester (Leicester)

The Rev David Gifford, Vicar of St Peter, Sudbury (Mendips) to be Vicar, Edlington with Little Bookham (Gildford)

The Rev David Newman, Vicar (Oxford), and Honorary Canon of Exeter Cathedral, Exeter, to be also Vicar, Loughborough Emmanuel and Nantons St Mary (Leicester).

The Rev Canon Popham, Assistant Canon, Truro, Cornwall, to be Team Vicar, Westwroughton (Gloucestershire)

The Rev Geoffrey Read, Team Vicar, Westborough to be Team Rector, Westwroughton.

Prebendary Jeanne Summers, Priest-in-charge.

St Mary, Marden with Amberley, and Wotton: to be also Priest-in-charge. St Andrew, Adornum-on-Lugg, and Crunston as Rural Dean of Hereford Rural Deanery (Hereford).
The Rev John Theobald, Chaplain of HM Prison, Armley: to be Vicar, Leeds St Cyprian, Harrogate (Ripon).
The Rev Nicholas Varmon, Curate, Poppitford (Lissadelf): to be Priest-in-charge. St Nicholas, Sutton St Nicholas; St Michael, Sutton St Michael; St Peter, Widdingham; St Bartholomew, Wothley (Hereford).

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Labour should learn the cross-party lesson

Not everyone would go on television to denounce their husband as a "frothing, rabid dog". And not everyone's husband would respond on another channel: "I went home and bit her." But there are very few couples like Mary Matalin and James Carville, whose marriage is a public symbol of the bipartisanship of Bill Clinton's second administration. Mr Carville is the "ragin' Cajun" who ran Mr Clinton's first campaign for the presidency, and who is now running a vendetta on the President's behalf against the special prosecutor in the Whitewater affair, Kenneth Starr. Ms Matalin was one of George Bush's 1992 campaign team, and is now a regular Republican media commentator. They fell in love while taking chunks out of each other in the heat of political battle, and continue to do so in public in one of Washington's most entertaining vaudeville acts.

For Mary and Jim, political insults are terms of endearment. Their political differences are not deep, or serious, or ideological. They care deeply about the ends of politics, but for them the argument about the means is a game. Calling him a mad canine was a public display of affection. With the exception of the religious right, which turned out to be very much a minority force in this year's presidential election, this reflects the state of American politics.

Bipartisanship is the watchword of the

renewed White House. Mr Clinton has appointed Republican Senator William Cohen as Secretary of Defence – the first time a top cabinet job has been given to someone from the opposing party for 25 years. The appointment of the hawkish Madeleine Albright as the first woman Secretary of State broke a different precedent, but was also in line with the centrist approach. She has courted Republican opinion with her attacks on the United Nations leadership.

Last week the President set out his strategy for the next four years, declaring that the centre "can hold, has held, and the American people are asking it to continue to hold". In part, this is simply an acknowledgement of the realities of Washington politics. Mr Clinton faces a Republican majority in both Houses of Congress and, in any case, nothing can get through without bipartisan agreement, because of the 60-vote majority required in the Senate to carry the guillotine and prevent bills being talked out. In part, it is because Mr Clinton falls into the "healer" category of politician, rather than the "warrior" category. He did better when Congress was against him, after the 1994 mid-term Republican landslide, than before.

Bipartisanship was also central to the President's re-election. The strategy, called "triangulation" by his advisers, was to position him above and between the Democratic and Republican parties. Now his hopes of significant

reform in his second term depend on the success of the same strategy in office. If he is to achieve his historic goal of cutting the welfare budget to balance the books by 2002, he will need Republican support.

Is this a principle that should apply beyond the United States? We ask only because of the impending visit to Tony Blair's war room of George Stephanopoulos, one of Mr Carville's associates who spent the past four years next door to the Oval Office as the President's senior adviser. Mr Stephanopoulos, 35, has a reputation as a liberal, although he is famous for the observation that you

can never be too right wing in an election campaign. That seems to be a lesson Mr Blair has already taken to heart. He intends to fight the election as leader of the party of the "radical centre", and often refers to the fact that his views on Europe are identical to those of Kenneth Clarke, the Chancellor.

More than that, he has stolen the Conservative "One Nation" label and says he hopes "many" on the Tory benches would support the policies of a new Labour government. Even if the Liberal Democrats' claim that 12 Tory MPs would defect if a Euro-sceptic became Tory leader after the election is

mischievous, it is certainly true that there will be about 60 Tories prepared to vote with the Liberal Democrats and a Labour government on Europe.

This is Mr Blair's tripartisan approach, and it offers the prospect of a realignment of British politics along pro- and anti-European lines. It goes without saying that the parallels with American politics are not exact. Europe represents an ideological divide in our politics, even a schism of national identity, of the kind which is largely absent on the other side of the Atlantic. The Europhobes are more powerful than the religious right in America, although they could marginalise themselves by driving their programme towards British withdrawal from the European Union.

The British political system, lacking the institutional checks and balances of the American Constitution, does not require cross-party consensus to drive forward a blueprint for reform – as Margaret Thatcher proved. But there is now a pro-European majority in the House of Commons which is likely to be significantly larger after the election, despite an overwhelming press bias against it. And Mr Blair accepts the argument that ambitious reforms, such as those planned and hinted at for our constitution and welfare system, will be better designed and longer lasting if they command cross-party support.

Last time, with Mr Clinton's diver-

sion into gays in the military and the failure of his health care reforms, the US President offered Labour negative lessons in how to assume the responsibilities of office. This time, he seems to offer a much more positive model. Listen out for a spokesman for Mr Blair describing Kenneth Clarke affectionately as a frothing, rabid dog.

Where to next, Madonna?

The critics say Eva Peron is the role Madonna was born to play: the rags to riches tale of a ferociously ambitious Catholic girl who fought her way to fame and fortune, addicted to public attention and glamour. But surely there are still hundreds of personas for the queen of reincarnation to play. Her six lives so far – teen idol, Marilyn, material girl, sex machine, mother, Evita – have all been crammed into the time most of us take to work out how you pay a mortgage. Clearly the trick is to come up with roles that end in an A, such as Madonna (as in "and child"). For example, Delilah has disaster written all over it, but Evita and Cruella (as in De Vil) are guaranteed success. So where to now, Ms Ciccone? Hedda (as in Gable)? Maria (as in Von Trapp)? The world's your oyster.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Seeds of peril in genetically altered food

Sir: Following Nicholas Schoon's article "Nothing to fear from techno-corn" (11 December), I would like to express my concern over the "wholesome meal" that he believes genetically engineered food represents.

First, the destructive possibilities of GE food go well beyond the "dozens, perhaps hundreds" of lives lost that he predicts. Beyond the danger of a crop "taking on an uncontrollable life of its own", we contend with dangers from:

Allergies (where an individual allergic to peanuts, for example, could suffer fatal shock in reaction to a peanut gene engineered into an unrelated foodstuff);

Antibiotic resistance: the process of altering DNA often requires the introduction of genes that protect against antibiotics, which could recombine with bacteria in the human stomach – a good way to encourage "superbugs" that infect humans but are immune to antibiotic treatment;

The possibility of epidemics, which gather strength in transferring between species. In a worst-case scenario, which may not be likely but which is certainly possible, "human survival would be marginal" (Cummins, the University of West Ontario, 1994).

If all of these risks were necessary to avert famine and produce major benefits to the population, perhaps they would be tolerable – however, "for food-altered patents, 98 per cent of genetic alterations are done to make food production and processing easier and more profitable for the companies doing it. Only 2 per cent are aimed at improved taste and nutrition" (the Council for Responsible Genetics).

Forcing GE food on us is not merely "regrettable", but criminally irresponsible. BEN MORAN London SW7

Sir: The Liberal Democrats are keen to embrace new and appropriate technology ("Nothing to fear from techno-corn", 11 December). However, we take issue with the assertion that "if a technology turns out to be a loser, we are also capable of rejecting it." When manipulating genetic structures it is not always possible to turn back the clock. This requires that we have stringent regulation in place.

Public unease can only increase when faced with the apparent ability of multinational food and chemical companies to foreclose the options even before governments and their regulatory authorities are aware of the possible long-term implications. This is a classic case of the public watchdogs noticing the empty stable only once the horse has long since bolted.

Furthermore, without separate supply mechanisms by which the genetically modified product is distinguishable, how is it possible to trace the source of any potential problem? Such a system also makes comprehensive labelling a more viable option. Linked to this is the need for investment in research and monitoring of the long-term effects of genetically manipulated organisms.

On an issue as fundamental as the food we eat, the consumer



deserves a cautious and considered approach – not one driven by commercial interests alone. MATTHEW TAYLOR MP (Trent, Lib Dem) Liberal Democrat Environment Spokesperson PAUL TYLER MP (North Cornwall, Lib Dem) Liberal Democrat Agriculture and Rural Affairs Spokesperson House of Commons London SW1

Sir: Genetically engineered soya is a major concern to many. Vegans and vegetarians will no doubt suffer more than most, as soya is probably the most used substitute for meat, milk and butter.

It is difficult enough for those of us who have decided to cross from vegetarianism to veganism after the latest worries over BSE and CJD. Now our choices will be limited even more with the news that this imported soya will not be labelled. A PANTELI Southampton

Nation poorer with student fees

Sir: David Walker argues that "students must pay for their privileges" (12 December) by paying fees for higher education. Graduates who go on to earn higher incomes will contribute more to the educational budget in higher taxation; there is no need in addition to burden young people just starting out on their careers with crippling loans. It is important that a proportion of high-quality graduates should go into less well paid, vocational

public sector jobs such as nursing, teaching or local government.

Not all students should be forced to pursue degrees such as medicine, law or engineering which lead directly to specified employment.

Finally, students from poorer backgrounds will think twice before applying to higher education.

The effect of his proposals will be to produce a workforce of trained (rather than educated) middle-class automatons, whose only interest is to seek a job in the financial sector in order to repay their debts, and the country will be the poorer for it. Tax, when used to provide equitable access to education based on merit alone, universal health care or affordable public transport is not an evil but a good and noble thing. This seems to be an unutterable truth at present. DR DAVID OLIVER Sevenoaks, Kent

Harrods chief willing to swear

Sir: In his piece analysing the effects of the Willets affair ("Self-regulation scores a victory in the House", 12 December) Donald Macintyre quotes some unnamed Tories.

According to him, they were quietly pointing out that the recommendation that witnesses before the Commons Standards and Privileges Committee should

in future give evidence under oath would constrain me if and when I was called to give evidence on the "cash for questions" affair. This is an unworthy suggestion and gives a completely wrong reading of the situation.

I have nothing to fear about giving evidence under oath – quite the contrary. I have told the truth throughout.

I shall continue to tell the truth to the committee or Sir Gordon Downey or to anyone who is prepared to investigate with vigour the political conspiracy of which I have been the victim. Perhaps that is the real reason those Tory MPs are quiet. MAL FAYED Chairman, Harrods London SW1

Aids research short of funds

Sir: Jack O'Sullivan ("A new stone wall", 11 December) reported that right-wing campaigners are claiming that too much money is being spent on Aids, but did not examine the distorted basis of those claims.

Gordon McVie of the Cancer Research Campaign was quoted as saying that the Government spends £14m a year on Aids research but only £15m on research into cancer, which causes many more deaths. However, cancer studies are underpinned by a further £163m for more basic research. Charities contribute well over £100m for

cancer research on top of this public funding, but there is almost no charitable money for research into HIV/Aids. HILARY CURTIS Executive Director, British Medical Association Foundation for Aids London WC1

Sir: Jack O'Sullivan rightly describes dangers of a right-wing backlash against gay-run Aids service organisations. The current euphoria about recent developments in Aids treatments is premature, because nobody knows what the long-term effects of the new drug combinations will be. Nobody knows what to do about the many people for whom these drugs don't work at all.

Further, the bitter truth is that those in developing countries who make up the vast majority of people with Aids have no access to potentially life-saving treatments because they can't afford them. It is very disturbing that so little attention is paid to this problem by Western Aids service organisations. UDO SCHULLENK Lecturer in Applied Ethics University of Central Lancashire Preston

Dollar puzzle

Sir: So, it's to be E for the euro (report, 12 December), just as it's Y for the yen and £ (Libra) for the pound. But why \$ for the dollar? DR J KEITH ELLIOTT Department of Theology University of Leeds

Hypocrisy over drug dangers

Sir: Your article on ecstasy and club culture (11 December) contained some interesting figures. According to the Government, around 1 million ecstasy tablets are sold every week, and there have been 100 "ecstasy related" deaths in the past eight years. If the same sales figures can be applied back over those eight years, I make that roughly 400 million tablets consumed, 1 death for every 4 million pills. All of these deaths were tragic, but how does this figure compare with the number of deaths caused by tobacco, or alcohol, or cars?

The London Drug Policy Forum are to be congratulated for their sensible proposals, but what is really needed is for the Government to rethink drugs policy. Current policies are as effective as the laws against alcohol in the US in the Twenties, and just as hypocritical: is there any possible justification for drugs such as cannabis and ecstasy to be illegal when other drugs, notably cigarettes and alcohol, are not only legal but provide huge amounts of revenue for the Treasury? SIMON EVERETT Reading, Berkshire

Sir: I look forward to the campaign of the Health Education Authority to reduce smoking in young women (report, 12 December). Perhaps you could make a start by depicting your supermodel columnists, Jo Brand and Bridget Jones, without a cigarette between their fingers. DR P D O DAVIES Consultant Physician Liverpool

TV censors on the march

Sir: I am the father of a two-year-old daughter and I too am worried about violence on TV ("Why EastEnders is scarier than Tarantino", 13 December), but I am more worried about where it will be in 20 years' time.

I can't help feeling that my daughter will be deprived of the works of such writers as Dennis Potter, Jimmy McGovern and Alan Bleasdale. And where will it stop? In the last few years we have already seen this moral minority try to ban films by Martin Scorsese, Oliver Stone and David Cronenberg. Will it be books next? Violence has always been part of society. After all it is the Bayeux Tapestry that tells of the Norman conquest, not the Normans going out to conquer because they were watching too much tapestry. MATTHEW WEBB Eastling, Kent

Sir: The debate about violence on TV centres on observance of the 9pm watershed and on children's welfare. I am a normal adult woman who has difficulty finding anything I feel comfortable watching after 9pm. The constant diet of doom, gloom and violence, whatever the quality of the drama, is depressing. Never mind the children, what about me? Mrs LOIS BURKE Teddington, Middlesex

Diatribes or true Christianity

Sir: I commend Polly Toynbee's caustic advice ("Just say No to this agonising aunt", 9 December), in reference to the appointment by The Daily Telegraph of Anne Atkins as its first agony aunt. Priestley's accompanying cartoon bore sufficient testimony to the direction in which right-wing, quasi-Christian morality is heading in this country.

By contrast, the former Archbishop of York, Lord Habgood, in his final address to the General Synod in July 1995, described a Church "which is willing to operate within many of the assumptions of its surrounding culture, and wants to stand alongside puzzled people at all levels of society, as they try to make sense of their lives and responsibilities".

The diatribes of the Anne Atkinses, William Oddie, and Mary Kennys of this world will ensure that morality remains what Oscar Wilde described as "an attitude one adopts towards people one doesn't like". There was once a radical liberal who rode roughshod over the venerable regulations of his day and exploded the prejudices of religious leaders and moralists because he wanted to set people free. His name was Jesus Christ. The Rev MICHAEL HAMPEL Spennymoor, Co Durham

Unfair to fake fur

Sir: I was delighted to hear of the new anti-fur initiative by Respect for Animals (report, 14 December). I would be very sorry to be seen dead wearing fur. But could activists please ask sympathisers to be careful before attacking in public women who merely appear to be wearing fur? I have been the object of invective, and have even been spat at, for wearing my fake fur, when I have forgotten to wear my People for Ethical Treatment of Animals anti-fur badge. JULIA PARKER London W14

essay



We laugh at the silliness of Hollywood's image of Britain, with its singing chimney-sweeps and raccoon-infested countryside. But, argues Peter Popham, we are also uncomfortable to find ourselves cast in roles we once gave to the peoples of the Empire

With the live-action remake of *101 Dalmatians* now on release, and the original 1961 cartoon on sale as a video, we are free to observe at leisure the persistence of a strange American, and specifically Walt Disney, obsession with England, or with a sort of England. And to chuckle, preen or reich, according to taste.

To walk into a cinema off the London streets and watch any of Disney's depictions of our capital city is a peculiar experience. St Paul's may find itself on the opposite side of the river from the West End, whose neon goes on and on. Big Ben becomes the last stop before Never-Never Land and (in the new *Dalmatians*) Knightsbridge borders directly on to the Thames.

London does not always suffer in being re-imagined this way. Anthony Lane in *The New Yorker* says that the London of the new *Dalmatians* film is "horribly damp and dull", but that this "could be excused as hyperrealism". In the original, 1961 animated version, however, set, like Dodie Smith's book, in the environs of Regent's Park, the artists responsible had no time for Sir John Nash's creamy neo-classicism - too much like Washington DC, perhaps - but instead took the rather grave, ornate style found in Wimpole Street and New Cavendish Street and gave it an enlivening, Parisian twist, arguably an improvement. Only when Roger and Anita get married and settle down do the artists stumble into cliché, squashing them into a tumbledown cottage that would be more at home in a Grimm's fairytale. A first-time-buyer's flat must be hard to Disney-fy.

Out in the countryside it's harder to go wrong: as long as the landscape has a bit of a roll to it, and is dotted at intervals with hedges, stiles, rivers and rustic stone bridges, it says England to most people, including most of us. Director Stephen Herek has contrived to commit spectacular and gratuitous solecisms by the inclusion of such non-native species as skunk and raccoon, for the sake of a few off-colour jokes. Though in the age of the Beast of Bodmin, most things are possible.

But of course the Disney vision of England doesn't stop at the scenery. Most of the people in this sort of England are sort of English. And like the architecture and the animal



A vision of olde England

life, they go through some weird changes in their journey through the Disney brain.

One has grown accustomed to the fact that when Hollywood wants to tell audiences that so-and-so is a truly bad person, a monster of egotism, a little shit, a grasping pseud with paedophile tendencies, the quickest way to do it, besides giving him a moustache and a 50-a-day cigarette habit, is by using a fairly fruity British accent: clock Marlon Brando, for example, as the mad, eponymous geneticist in the new, absurd remake of *The Island of Dr Moreau*, with his preposterous Etonian twang.

There is a simple explanation for this: Wasps (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants), because of their historic privileges and snobberies, are the only ethnic group in America who are

always fair game for a good kicking; and the Waspiest of the lot, with the added advantage of being the old oppressor, are the Brits. Nothing can provoke the average American to like British toffspeak. "I don't believe the British accent is really an accent at all," as one American put it. "It's just a conspiracy to make the rest of the world feel bad." One of the many refreshing things about *Toy Story* is that Mr Potato Head (the bad guy) talks neither like Neville Chamberlain nor Reggie Kray. He's just another American.

But watch Disney closely, ideally over and over again on video in the company of an addicted small child, and you realize it's not that simple. Take a film like *Jungle Book*, for instance. The original story is by Kipling and India was once

part of the British Empire, but there is no overpowering reason why the creatures of the jungle should speak like Brits. Yet most of them do: not only the arch-villain, Shere Khan the tiger, with the most splendidly resonant growl in film, but most of the other animals as well. There is the leader of the wolves, who demands that Mowgli be sent back to the man village, the militaristic elephants, the black panther, the vultures who befriend Mowgli and who look a bit like The Beatles and mangle Liverpoolian horribly.

This leaves only two main characters to talk like honest-to-goodness Americans: Baloo the bear ("that shiftless, good-for-nothing jungle bum", as the panther describes him) and Mowgli himself, the two characters who epitomise spontaneity, irresponsibility and naturism.

It's a similar story in *Peter Pan*: all the figures both of evil and of maturity and authority use Britspeak: not only Hook but also Mr and Mrs Darling, Wendy, and her pompous brother, John. Only the wild and the free are exempt: the baby, Michael, and Peter himself. In the cartoon of *Dalmatians*, only the baby puppies talk American.

Watching Disney's depictions of England and Englishness as an English person oneself is not totally unlike being an Indian or

Arab or Chinese looking at 19th-century orientalist paintings or reading the orientally-based fiction of Conrad or Stevenson: there is the disturbing sense of being objectified, of being depicted in a way that, while apparently flattering and in some ways even observant, robs one of humanity and authenticity and autonomy, and makes one an ornament in a depiction of the world by those who are more powerful than oneself.

It is a version of the orient-

alist perspective described and attacked nearly 20 years ago by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* - the irony being that the British, in their imperial heyday, were the masters of this orientalist fallacy. Now it is being done to us.

But there is a difference. The sentimental vision of England incarnate in films like *Dalmatians* and *Mary Poppins* is one which we, too, have invested in. Dick Van Dyke may be intolerable and loathsome as the cockney chimney-

sweep, but much else in the Disney vision has the power to melt our hearts: the ranks of London chimney pots silhouetted against the sky, the apple order of an old-fashioned house with big dogs and blazing fires and north-country staff in starched aprons and caps; the immemorial scenery of Big Ben and double-deckers, the rolling hills and thatched cottages, the overwhelming sense of a cosy, comfortable, well-regulated hierarchy temporarily disrupted for the purposes of the plot, but happily resumed once the villains have been defeated.

American audiences are besotted with this sort of nonsense, to the extent of allowing American characters, with their modern, spontaneous, anti-hierarchical temperaments, practically to be written out of the scripts. But it's no good sneering: evidence of our own infatuation with such imagery is no farther away than the nearest newsagent, where the cover of the Christmas number of *Country Life*, for example, is an engraving of a snow-covered village replete with happy,

London goes to the dogs, courtesy of Hollywood: Joely Richardson as Anita in the new film version of '101 Dalmatians'

sledging children but lacking anything such as a car or a television aerial or a shop sign to tell you what century you are in. Or the latest issue of *This England*, "Britain's Loveliest Magazine", which urges readers to "tune in to yesterday" ("Evergreen Melodies" cassettes, £4.99 each) or to buy books with titles like *Tykes*, *Dumplings* & *Scrumpy Jacks*.

In *Country Life* the potent cocktail of maudlin sentiment, antiques, and substantial thatched properties in the gated estates of Walton-on-Thames is at least tempered by a little wit, a little awareness of how contemporary realities do, as they must, intrude: uncomfortable facts like miscegenation, for example (this month's portrait photograph is of fashion designer Miss Selina Blow, who is "half-British, half-Sri Lankan", though seemingly all white). And the jokey Xmas snakes-and-ladders-like "Game of Villages" has lines such as "You discover the visiting Catholic bishop is your father - Back 4" and "The owner of the village shop wins the Lottery and closes down - Back 2". But when a solitary black face looms up - advertising "the ultimate running machine" - it's a jolt. What the hell's he doing here?

The unpleasant fact is that the cosy Disney fantasy of England is a projection of American wishful thinking at its most cloying and covertly racist. Why not locate the remake of *101 Dalmatians* in Manhattan? Because then you would have to contend with the Rainbow Coalition that is the real New York. Keep it in London, or rather in a fantasy city call it London, and you can indulge your whiter-than-white fantasies of order and hierarchy (and doubtless draconian immigration policies) for all they are worth, with no comeback.

Only the quarterly *This England* has the brutal honesty to make explicit the chauvinism that is at the root of all such sentimental conceptions of Home and Hearth: interspersing chocolate-box scenery with vituperative and fundamentalist anti-Europeanisms; captioning a placid scene of chomping cows with the bizarre allegation that BSE was imported from France after the Battle of Waterloo; overlaying images of castles and cottages and the Houses of Parliament with ringing patriotic messages:

"O, sons of the Motherland, obey, obey

The call of the old Home Flag..."

And this stuff goes down a treat in America, too. "I gaze at each picture with longing in my heart," writes Joan Matthews from California in the *Readers' Comments* column. "Of all the magazines I have subscribed to, *This England* is by far the best," writes another American. "It has great style and dignity."

It's flattering that Disney should lavish attention on our little island in preference to so many other places. But when one understands the game he's playing, that emotion is liable to curdle.



Wide-eyed at The Disney Store

Photograph: Andrew Buurman

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PAGEONE
COMMUNICATIONS

Watch out for the BBC's next offensive

Unlikely as it seems, I have been praying for the BBC. I have been praying that the BBC will come to its senses and not put out offensive material to poison our minds. And now it seems, after a period of despair, that my prayers have finally been answered. First of all, there was the bad tidings that Radio 4 had decided not to broadcast a new "comedy" programme called *Eamonn, Elder Brother of Jesus*, for fear that it might offend people. The controller of Radio 4, Mr James Boyle, did not say whom it might offend, but I think I can suggest who. Everyone! Elder brothers, Christians, Irish people, relations of Jesus, people called Eamonn, the Christian Brothers - almost everyone. James Boyle said his decision had nothing to do with his being a Catholic, but it was plain that Catholics would also be offended by the suggestion that Jesus had an Irish brother, so I think we can take it that James was telling a little white lie there. And if he wasn't, then he should have been.

Then, as if that wasn't enough of an answer to my prayer, comes the wonderful news that the BBC has decided to drop a comedy TV programme written by Ian Hislop and Nick Newman called *Gobble*, which depicts a Britain in the grip of a fictitious "mad turkey disease". The programme has already been made. It was due to go out. But the BBC has apparently withdrawn it for fear of causing distress to people in Scotland who have recently been suffering from the *E coli* bug. (And, they might well have added, for fear of offending people who run turkey farms for a livelihood, people who are vegetarians, and people who have turkeys in the family, or indeed people who have Douglas Hogg in the family.) Excellent! At last the BBC has begun to see the light. At last a bit of sensitivity and good taste at BBC HQ. But there is a long way to go yet. In order to spare people's feelings, may I submit this list of offensive programmes which figure prominently in my nightly prayers and which should be dropped forthwith?



Miles Kingston

1. Grand Prix racing. Deeply distressing to anyone who has ever been involved in a road accident. For Damon Hill to be voted BBC sports personality of the year is adding insult to salt in the wound.
2. *One Foot In The Grave*. Very offensive to anyone who is likely to die soon, or is just thinking of dying, or who has actually recently died.
3. *Absolutely Fabulous*. Causes immense pain to anyone with a drinking problem, to anyone with a

mother or daughter, or anyone who takes fashion seriously, if anyone still does. I gather, by the way, that this programme will not be returning to our screens. This will be excellent news for any empty-headed woman viewer who habitually tries to smoke, drink, talk and walk on high-heeled shoes simultaneously, as Joanna Lumley's character did so often, and who must have been humiliated beyond belief by the portrayal, if she could focus on it.

4. *Woman's Hour*. Absolutely mortifying for any man who habitually feels excluded.

5. *The News*. Deeply scarring for anyone who is a refugee, a war victim, a Palestinian, a politician, a member of the Royal Family, a Lamarkshire butcher, a farmer, a policeman, an Irish terrorist, a Catholic and so on. All these people? A policeman, for instance? Certainly. How often do we hear on the news statements such as: "Police have still made no progress in finding the killer of 18-year-old so-and-so"? How do you think

the police feel when their failure is blazoned across the news? Humiliated. Suicidal. Every bit as bad as an *E coli* bacteria sufferer faced with a programme about "mad turkey disease", that's how bad. In fact, a lot, lot worse.

6. Derek Cooper's *The Food Programme* on Radio 4, which must cause perpetual pain to all those of us who cook badly, buy mass-produced foods and stick to a rotten diet. Especially in Scotland, which we all know has the worst eating habits in Britain, and where, if *The Food Programme* is to be believed, Scots are likely to die an earlier, fat-saturated death even if they don't go to an *E coli*-linked grave. What must it be like to live in Scotland and hear what *The Food Programme* has to say about your diet?

The list is endless. I only pray that the BBC will continue to come to its senses and not risk offending anyone.

Do we want a BBC that takes risks? I think not. Luckily, the way things are going, we are in no danger of having one.

What 'The Sun' says about Blair and Europe

Yesterday, *The Sun* was succinct. None of those wishy-washy lines in the liberal – and indeed most of the Tory – press about how Tony Blair would retain the veto and stand up for Britain's interests as Prime Minister. Far from it. The paper that cuts to the chase was clear yesterday about the Labour leader's message in his weekend interviews: "Blair Vows: I'm backing Brussels. Labour to give up Veto on vital Euro laws".

That would be less interesting if it weren't that *The Sun* has become so unpredictable lately on questions of party politics. It has been – at times – a good deal more vitriolic about John Major than it has ever been about Tony Blair. And it wouldn't matter if *The Sun*'s obsessive Europhobia didn't have the capacity to inspire fear and loathing in both the main political parties. Which is why Labour reacted with such unbridled fury at yesterday's (page two) headline. Much more fury, predictably enough, than when John Major said most of the same things yesterday afternoon, claiming that a Labour government would conduct a "Dutch auction" of British sovereignty.

But did *The Sun* have a point? How far apart are the two parties on Europe? And can Major, with the albeit fickle backing of Rupert Murdoch's biggest-selling newspaper, still turn Europe into a vote winner? Let's quickly map out some territory. *The Sun*'s report was based largely on the well-known fact that Tony Blair doesn't rule out the possibility that Labour may agree in the current intergovernmental conference (IGC) to an extension of majority voting – as opposed to unanimity, which means each country can veto any proposal – in four policy areas: social, regional, industrial and environmental. It's also true that the Labour leader has shown no sign so far of finching – despite some wishful reports in right-wing newspapers to the contrary – from signing up to the social chapter.

David Davies, the Government's European minister, will continue what he skillfully began in Dublin last week – extracting the maximum from all this to argue that Blair is ready to sell British sovereignty down the river. As it happens there are no proposals yet to extend majority voting in any of those areas – though there is a powerful case for doing so on the environment, since pollution has a nasty habit of crossing borders. The real-world impact of the social chapter is probably exaggerated by both its defenders and its critics. And even John Major for the first time slipped into his own BBC interview the admission that he wouldn't utterly, for eternity, rule out an extension of majority voting if there was "some tiny area lurking in the undergrowth" that he hadn't yet thought about. Prime ministers don't usually say things like that if they're not rather carefully keeping possible compromises open.

None of that will stop the energetic Mr



Donald Macintyre

A Labour government might be listened to in the EU, and that's a prize worth keeping in play

uncomfortable position in the run-up to the election. As it is now, he has the space to argue that on first-order issues his formal position is close to that of John Major's but that the big difference is that he has a manageable party and Major doesn't. And, as a result, that he will be able to exercise more influence in Europe if and when elected.

You don't have to sign up to the misty-eyed proposition that "all Europe is waiting for Tony Blair" to think there is quite a lot in this. Major and Kenneth Clarke have consistently argued that to retain its influence over the shape of EMU it needs to leave open the possibility that it will join. But as it is, it is largely thanks to the respect that Kenneth Clarke enjoys in Europe – and his occasional dogged willingness to gatecrash the odd caucus meeting – that Britain retains some of that influence. From time to time, the idea has been mooted in Whitehall that the UK government should simply propose formally that the single currency should be postponed. There is an excellent case for it. But a British proposal of that kind would be laughed out of court as a move patently motivated by the vested interest of a party, a growing number of whose MPs want to be outside Europe, let alone EMU. It doesn't take much imagination to see that a Labour government – even one saying it didn't want to join EMU in the first wave but did want to be in the second – might be listened to rather carefully on all sorts of substantive points, including whether the celebrated Maastricht criteria were being fudged. And that's a prize worth keeping in play. *Sun* or no *Sun*.

As the Round Room goes, so does an era

by Malcolm Bradbury

I was in 1953 that, after a great taking-up of references and a rigorous examination from the superintendents, I first acquired one of the most precious badges to which a young writer and would-be academic could aspire. I was granted a reader's ticket to the Round Reading Room of the British Museum. For several years after, I became a daily habitué of what, for me and many others, was the most literary and scholarly spot in the world.

It lay in the heart of Bloomsbury, a London postal district that still, in the Angry Fifties, kept much of its old aura. "I ask nothing better than all reviewers, for ever and everywhere, should call me a highbrow," Virginia Woolf once wrote in a letter. "If they like to add Bloomsbury, W.C.1, that is the correct postal address. But if your reviewer... dares hint that I live in South Kensington, I will sue him for libel."

By the 1950s, Woolf had gone, battered by the wartime bombing of Bloomsbury. So had some of the associations. Houses she'd had in nearby Georgian squares were shattered by bombing; some were being monstrous rebuilt as hotels or flats. Still, the area around the museum and the Senate House hung mistily on to its strong literary associations. T.S. Eliot, whose magazine, *The Criterion*, had carried much of British literary modernism, still worked as a publisher in Faber and Faber, over on the corner of Russell Square.

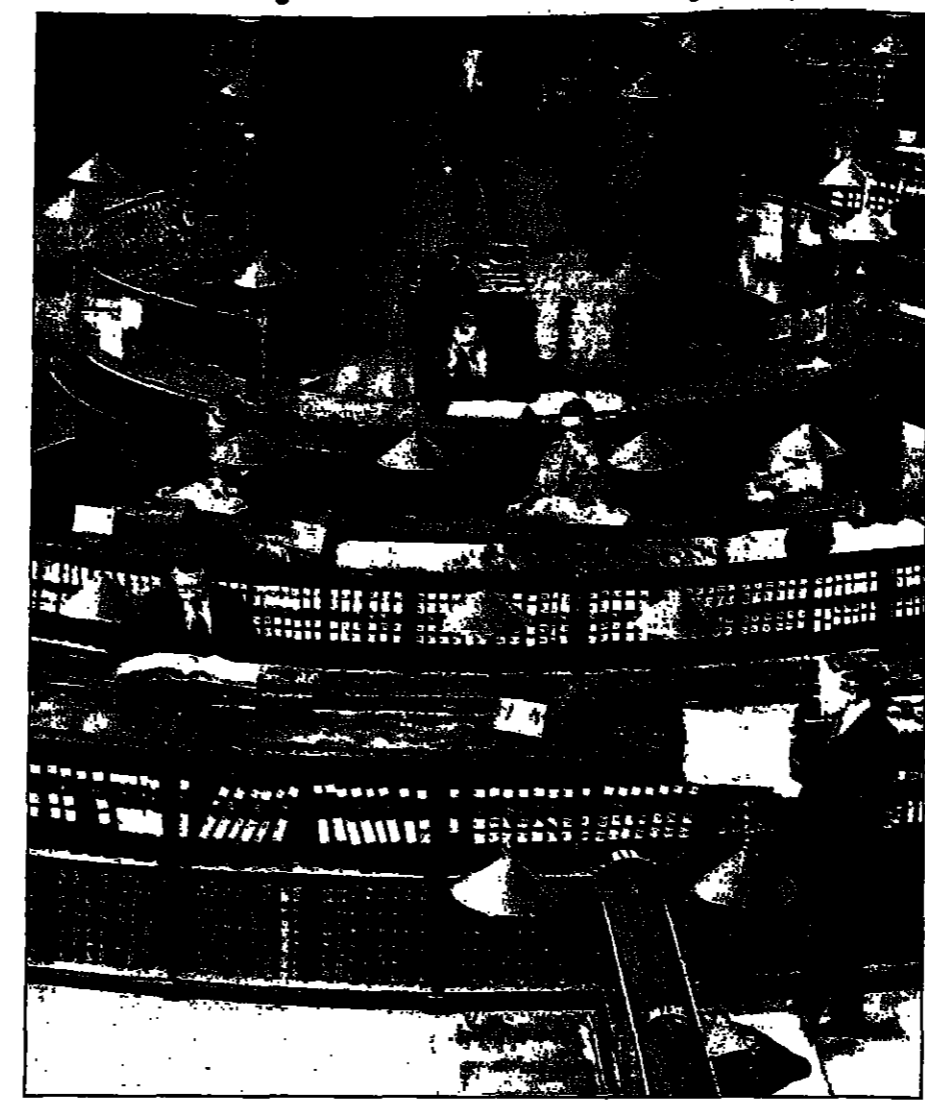
Great Russell Street remained packed with small publishers, odd bookshops and print shops, and the wet, dingy pubs and tea shops were crowded with writers and would-be's who casually survived on casual reviewing, or were about to start up some new, hideously under-funded magazine or poetry imprint. Post-war Bloomsbury still remained a literary district; the Round Reading Room, with its great spoked desks, still remained its hub.

The regular users were the freelance writers and academics, the condition to which I aspired. As Britain's great library of deposit, it (or its outlying colonies and dependencies, such as the newspaper library at Colindale) held the stock of everything. Or not quite: the bombing had depleted it, too. The great catalogue, painfully stuck together with paste and human hand, showed the wartime depredations, which the keepers were now trying to restore.

I was, as it happened, work-

ing on a history of the modern British literary periodicals. Many of them had been born in Bloomsbury, some created by editors – like Eliot himself, or John Lehmann or Cyril Connolly – one could still meet about the premises. Literary periodicals are writing's living edge; they are where the interesting new writers and the powerful new movements generally show up first. Imagism and Vorticism had begun here, just round the corner. The Rebel Art Centre and the Poetry Bookshop had been just a stone's throw away.

Writing, as everyone knows, had long flourished under the 140ft dome. That meant not just Karl Marx writing *Das Kapital*, or Virginia Woolf researching her reviews. Poems and short stories were still habitually worked out during the long morning wait for books. With a peculiar appropriateness, the deputy superintendent who surveyed the doings of the gathered scholars and eccentrics from his glass cage was Angus Wilson – whose high-pitched voice resounded round the silent room, and who was writing there himself.



It was the dry spot in a wet London, the sanctum of sanctums, the heartland of books

I wrote poetry and fiction there, and even fell in love. It was with Jean Rook, who records her own thesis-writing experience in her autobiography *The Cowardly Lioness*. "Eight hours a day in the British Museum is a killer, unless you're a mummy," she notes, adding that the chief relief was to escape to the music room with the present writer, who was (as she reminds me) writing his first novel down at desk D4.

For my Fifties generation, the BM was home to many novels, and some of them did explicit homage to the hallowed room. Margaret Drabble wrote vividly of working there. So did David Lodge in *The British Museum is Falling Down*, a novel richly filled with epigraphs from the many previous writers who had written in what has rightly been called "the favourite working space in the world".

Given the multiplication of publishing, it was inevitable that one day the Reading Room would outgrow itself, and a new, dedicated British Library be built. It has not been an edifying tale; and the departure of books, scholars and writers from Great Russell Street to St Pancras has been about as emotionless and unpassionate as the new, unromantic building itself.

Worse still, though, is the planned future of the Round Reading Room. I am unhappy to say it – since the architect is Norman Foster, whose work I profoundly admire – yet the world's most bookish space is to be robbed of its bookishness. It will be re-incorporated into the British Museum itself. Some of the great iron stacks which are essential to its atmosphere will be removed; the great open space will be divided by a glass screen.

Looked at abstractly, we can say that what's happening to the Round Reading Room is a metaphor for a kind of bookishness we have come to dispense with. It will be appropriately deconstructed into a new room of glass walls and computers. As one of the trustees puts it, its main function as "a centre of information will be unchanged, although it will use the latest technology".

The reading room was never a "centre of information"; it was a great place of writing and scholarship. What we are deconstructing is an entire history of literariness. Taking one of the greatest human spaces ever devised for imagination and inquiry, we are robbing it of its meaning.

Mr Fix-it goes global

Simon Edge talks to the once reviled by-election bruiser Andy Ellis

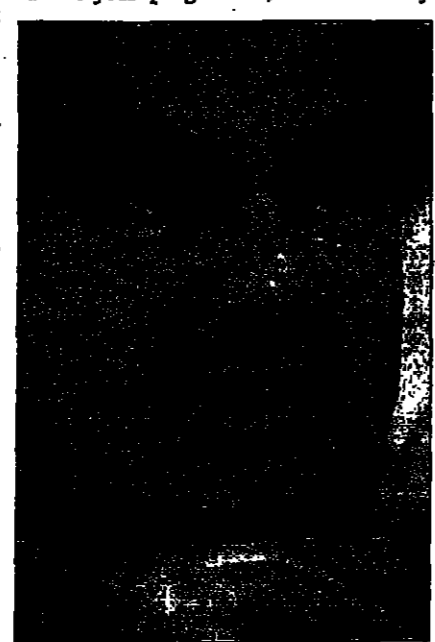
The Romanian revolution broke out at Christmas 1989. Most of us were content to watch events unfold on television, between the Queen's Speech and the James Bond film, but not Andy Ellis. He filled up his car with emergency supplies, hooked up with a friend in Budapest and entered bullet-pocked Timisoara three days after the fall of the dictator Ceausescu. "It was dangerous, but not particularly scary to me," he recalls.

"Perhaps I'm not easily scared." If Ellis doesn't suffer from fear, he sure as hell inspires it. As vice-chairman and then secretary-general of the Liberal Party for much of the 1980s, he struck terror into the hearts of his Labour and Tory opponents by presiding over the series of spectacular by-election upsets that threatened for a while to change the shape of British politics. And now, although he's all smiles and geniality, he's scaring the pants off me.

We're huddled in the kitchen at the bustling south London headquarters of the lobby firm GJW, of which Ellis is a director, discussing the company's success in picking up contracts to run elections in Palestine, Bosnia and now Yemen. I'm trying to pluck up the courage to ask how someone associated – rightly or wrongly – with the dirtiest tricks in politics can forge a second career out of guaranteeing fair play. Trouble is, he's six-foot-three and the windows rattle when he speaks.

"Political players are supposed to be skilled at getting the result they want, within the overall framework of the rules, and it's the job of politicians to campaign as effectively as they know how within that framework," he says, in the stentorian Brummie tones that used to excite the by-election sketch writers almost as much as his stick-in-the-plaster speech and nerdy pullover. "What we are doing is establishing the framework in which those campaigns can take place." His people never ventured outside the confines of electoral law, he insists. At a time when political lobbying is getting a bad press, Ellis is GJW's star turn. Now based in Brussels, he joined the firm as an Eastern European expert to set up offices in Budapest, Warsaw, Prague and Bucharest. Five or six years on, these outfits are thriving in their own right, and Ellis

is busy bringing the ballot box to some of the world's most democratically-challenged areas. He and his team bring the know-how, from drawing up constituency boundaries to organising the count and handling the media, while the international community picks up the tab. Ellis's technical assistance package, costing around £1m for a two-year programme, is a relatively



small price for the UN or the European Commission to pay if it helps bring stability to a war zone.

Elections are in Ellis's soul. He first stood for Parliament in 1974, as a Liberal, at the age of 22. Two years later, he made headlines by coming a surprise second in the Newcastle Central by-election. He tried twice more to reach Westminster, but his true métier turned out to be getting other people elected. In Bermondsey in 1983, he masterminded what remains the biggest by-election swing in modern political history. Labour's Peter Tatchell, vilified for homosexuality he chose then not to acknowledge, was opposed by a rebel

from his own party, John O'Grady. As canvassers did the rounds wearing "I've kissed Peter Tatchell" badges, Simon Hughes romped home for the Liberals and has held the one-time Labour stronghold ever since.

Ellis picked up an OBE for political services and wound up as chief executive of the merged Social and Liberal Democrats. He says he bears no grudge against the SDP loyalists who allegedly plotted his ousting in 1989, and he is still a paid-up Lib Dem. "I'm very happy with what we developed in the Eighties, which was a series of major innovations in election campaigning," he says. But would some of those by-elections pass the test of the electoral supervision that GJW now offers? Take the Tatchell lapel badges, or the notorious "Which queen would you vote for?" leaflets in the same campaign. "Those weren't done by Liberals. As far as I remember they were done by the O'Grady people." But did he approve? Pause. Smile. "Nothing went on in Bermondsey that we were unhappy with," he chuckles.

By-elections generate enduring stories, Ellis says, but so do international peace-keeping elections – whereupon he meanders off into a long story about Palestine, the punchline of which is basically that winters on the West Bank are colder than you'd think. Perfectly true, and the tale is jolly enough, but this is hardly the stuff of legend. Not like the one about the Labour activists burning the Liberal "battle bus" after the Newcastle-under-Lyme by-election in 1986. The Liberals are said not to have complained too much because they knew they deserved it.

But times have changed, and so, no doubt, has Ellis. He certainly looks different. There's a stain on his shirt but the pullover has gone and the black plastic glasses have given way to fancier frames. Dressing down to make people underestimate him may have worked on the by-election battlefield, but it's a less productive tactic in the clean-cut world of international consultancy.

I can't leave without asking what he's done with the pullover. Pause. Ominously long pause, in fact. Then the gravely boom: "There are a lot of myths about me." And finally, praise be, the table wobbles. He's laughing.

Are we talking avocado again?

The year was 1968 and the biggest thing that has ever happened in bathroom suites was being mixed up at Armitage Shanks in Staffordshire. That was the colour avocado – now a cliché, then a huge hit that went on to sell an estimated 1 million suites.

"It was a one-off. It could never happen again for something to become so popular, so dramatically. It bordered on the freakish, but in the nicest possible way," says the commercial services manager, Sam Woodberry. "From 1972 to 1978, avocado outsold all other colours put together. It really did become accepted to talk about bathroom suites at the swiftest cocktail parties. You could say, 'Oh, we've got an avocado bidet.'"

How soon we forget. The words "avocado" and "bidet" are now only mentioned in the same sentence as "care in the community". Witness this month's *Elle Decoration*: "The all-white bathroom representing purity in the Twenties is now a clear statement of superior taste. Even estate agents now talk disparagingly of the avocado bathroom suite, which has replaced garden gnomes as an object of ridicule."

Never believe anything you read in a magazine devoted to "emotional photography", but this did check out. Hillred Homes in Sussex speaks for all estate agents when it states coldly that the "once-ubiquitous avocado suite is out". It may be out of production but it is really out of mind? After all, only months ago Black Forest gâteau was a cliché. Now, according to *EatSoup* magazine, it is on the comeback desert trolley. If avocado prawn can be fashionable again,

why not avocado suites? Paul Curtis of Roy Brooks estate agents in London snorts: "Well, I think we are talking about something that is around just a bit longer than a galeat." But this is exactly the point. Fashion gurus keep saying that brown is the new black, but nothing can replace avocado. Already the whisper in salubrious circles is that some of the darker Seventies colours (remember plum?) are poised to return and given up a decade that so far has been whiter than white.

Mr Woodberry has followed the market for 30 years and he says it is not a question of whether avocado will return, but when. Of course by that time, they may be extinct if current rip-off rates persist. One idea to avert this would be to start listing all avocado suites (1969 launch suites could have a special status).

Parliament is already showing interest. Not long ago, Peter Viggers (Conservative, Gosport) spoke on a related topic: "The House will be entranced to hear that men take an average of 45 seconds in the lavatory and women take an average of 80 seconds." He then argued that women need three times the amount of provision. "I hope that that plea will be heard by some of the people who make the decisions about the provision of public lavatories."

If we are on the brink of a boom in women's bathrooms – and this really would be a vote-getter with Worcester woman – then why not colour that future avocado? It's the kind of thing you just don't hear enough about at cocktail parties these days.

Ann Treneman

Your gift could be the only one she'll get this Christmas



Every year The Salvation Army helps thousands of children enjoy a proper Christmas – children who otherwise could expect nothing but loneliness, neglect or even physical abuse. We organise Christmas lunches, offering many children a much-needed square meal, as well as providing food parcels for needy families. We're even able to brighten up Christmas mornings with a few small, but gratefully received presents.

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Airbus shrugs off jet merger threat

Michael Harrison
London
and David Osborne
New York

Airbus Industrie, the European aircraft manufacturer, yesterday conceded that the Boeing takeover of McDonnell Douglas had increased the urgency for it to push ahead with its own restructuring into a fully commercial organisation.

But the four-nation consortium, in which British Aerospace has a 20 per cent stake, shrugged off suggestions that the merger of its two US rivals would seriously undermine its position in the civil jet market.

A source close to Airbus in Toulouse said: "This deal makes the need for Airbus to become a single corporate entity that much more acute. The four partners need to stop bickering among themselves and face up squarely to the enemy on the other side of the pond."

Claims that the \$45bn merger between the world's number one and number three aircraft manufacturers might overwhelm Airbus were, however,

dismissed. "People tend to forget that McDonnell Douglas is now an also-ran in the commercial aircraft market. It only accounts for 5-6 per cent of orders so I don't see how a merger with Boeing threatens us or makes life more difficult," said Bob Alizart, Airbus vice-president of corporate communications.

Strong backing for this view came from Sir Colin Marshall, chairman of British Airways, who said that, if anything, the Boeing deal would strengthen the hand of Airbus. Sir Colin, whose airline has never bought any Airbus aircraft, said the merger would remove from the market a bit player tempted to cause price distortions by undercutting its two bigger rivals.

Second, it would distract Boeing's attentions for at least 12 months while it was putting the merged company together. Third, said Sir Colin, it meant that airlines would insist on shortlisting Airbus for most new aircraft orders to ensure that there remained healthy competition between two strong manufacturers.

B&A and the three other Airbus partners - Aerospatiale of France, Germany's Daimler Benz and Casa of Spain, are due to sign a binding memorandum of understanding (MOU) by the end of this year setting out how the consortium will convert into a limited commercial company by 1999.

Edzard Reuter, the Airbus chairman and former head of Daimler Benz, was quoted as saying that the Boeing merger would accelerate the three-year timetable for transition. But these remarks appeared to be contradicted by Toulouse, which said that any other target date than 1999 would be "unrealistic".

Progress towards signing the binding MOU has been slowed up by a dispute among the Airbus partners over what assets they should put into the new company and who would be responsible for them.

At present the four companies are work-sharing partners who charge Airbus for building aircraft and then take a percentage of any profit made from selling them. When Airbus transfers into a public limited status the partners will become shareholders while Airbus will be able to contract production wherever it wishes.

The deal, meanwhile, was given a strong welcome on Wall Street yesterday with shares in both companies surging in early trading and analysts agreeing that for McDonnell Douglas in particular it was the only sensible long-term option.

Harry Stonocher, chief executive of McDonnell Douglas, said: "This was what we wanted. This was the only deal we considered, we did not shop the company around." Mr Stonocher will be chief operating officer of the new company.

Philip Condit, meanwhile, the CEO of Boeing, voiced optimism that the merger would win early approval from US monopoly regulators. "Look at this on a global scale and I believe that the anti-trust issue will not be there."

At the start of New York trading, Boeing stock was trading up \$5.75 at \$102.50, increasing the value of its all-share offer to close on \$15bn. More impressive was a \$12.25 jump in McDonnell Douglas shares to reach \$64.25.

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OECD praises UK economic policies

Diane Coyle
Economics Editor

The Government's economic policies have delivered the best growth and inflation prospects for 30 years, according to a glowing end-of-year report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The one criticism the agency makes is that progress in reducing the Government's budget deficit has been too slow. It predicts that the UK will not qualify for the single currency because the borrowing requirement will exceed the 3 per cent Maastricht ceiling.

In its twice-yearly economic outlook, published last week, the OECD says strong growth, falling unemployment and low inflation "are the most tangible signs of the positive benefits of past and ongoing microeconomic reforms and a stable macroeconomic policy framework". It is the latest in a stream of publications from the Paris-based organisation, funded by member governments, to lavish praise on Government policies.

Val Koromay, the organisation's deputy director for economic forecasts, said: "I'm not sure if one wants to be euphoric, but the OECD assessment is that there really are grounds to be solidly optimistic about the near-term prospects for the UK economy."

The Government was delighted by the support for its claims that its policies have helped push Britain up the growth league, Kenneth Clarke, the Chancellor, said: "This independent report from a highly respected international body supports my view that the UK economy is facing the best economic circumstances for a generation."

Indeed, the OECD's vigorously free-market economists say another dose of deregulation and flexibility would bring substantial benefits, even though the UK has already gone much further than continental Europe and Japan.

The new forecasts put Britain in the top half of the league of big industrial countries for growth, with only the Canadian economy expanding faster during the next two years. Its prediction of 3.3 per cent growth next year is below the 3.5 per cent Treasury forecast in the

grown faster in the UK than any other industrial country.

It reckons interest rates will have to rise, although by a mere quarter point by 1998. But the organisation says inflation will remain below the Government's target, making it much more optimistic than many other forecasters, including the Bank of England, the OECD thinks inflationary pressures have diminished since 1995.

The report says: "Inflation is projected to be below 2.5 per cent in the coming two years, aided in part by a significant rise in sterling's effective exchange rate and some firming of interest rates." It concedes there is some risk of inflationary pressure, but says there are no convincing signs yet that inflation is rising.

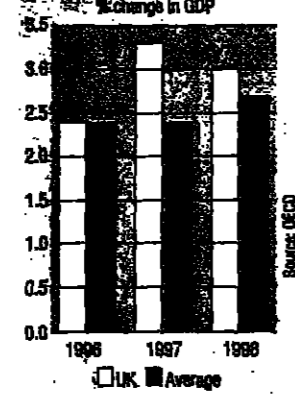
This optimistic outlook still puts UK inflation above the average for the G7 countries, at 2.2 per cent in 1997 and 1.9 per cent in 1998, compared with average rates of 1.7 per cent and 1.6 per cent respectively. But it concludes: "Prospects for achieving sustained output growth and low inflation are the best in 30 years, even though fiscal consolidation has been relatively slow."

The outlook for government borrowing is the one area where the think-tank is substantially more pessimistic than the Treasury. "Significant further progress in delivering the planned reduction in public sector borrowing will be needed."

In a forecast made before the Budget, it puts the ratio of government borrowing to GDP at 3.7 per cent in 1997 - the same as Italy - the key year for the decision as to which countries qualify to join the euro. Even the measures announced last month would be unlikely to get this below the 3 per cent ceiling.

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OECD growth forecast



Budget but around the average for independent economists. Consumer spending and private sector investment are expected to drive the above-trend growth. The OECD foresees unemployment falling below 7 per cent of the workforce by the second half of 1998, the third lowest among the big economies after Japan and the US. The report suggests that falling unemployment could reduce overall inequality even if the distribution of wages widens, providing the Government with some useful ammunition against the charge that income inequality has



Sharing in a bonanza (from left): Robert Howells, Len Wright, Godfrey Burley, Giles Fearnley and Kenneth Irvine

Prism founders get shares worth £5.4m

Patrick Tocher

The seven founder investors of Prism Rail, the company set up to tender for passenger train franchises, were awarded more free shares worth £5.4m yesterday after announcing plans to finance their fourth successful bid.

Details of the latest share bonanza emerged as Prism announced a £12m rights issue to help fund the contract to operate West Anglia Great Northern railway, the heavily subsidised line which runs from London to Stansted airport, Cambridge and Peterborough. The founders already own just over a third of Prism's shares, worth more than £30m at last night's closing price of



445p, compared to their placing price in May of 100p. The launch yesterday of the 5-for-28 rights issue at a deeply discounted 330p a share set off a complex ratchet mechanism.

Under the terms of a deal agreed when Prism gained a listing on the Alternative Investment Market, a total of 16.5 million deferred shares were issued at par to the founders in return for them agreeing to fund the cost of Prism tendering for rail franchises up to £2.7m.

In October the investors, six of whom run private bus companies, were awarded shares worth £7.4m after Prism took over two rail franchises, South Wales and West Railway and Cardiff Railway.

Prism defended the latest award of shares, saying the founders had taken the time and financial risk of bidding for 18 of the 25 available rail franchises without a guarantee they would win any. "We didn't borrow the

money, and we are taking no salary from Prism," said Godfrey Burley, Prism's chairman. The subscription agreement ensures that the founder investors receive deferred shares equivalent to 25 per cent of any new ordinary shares issued. The deferred shares are convertible into ordinary shares on a one-for-one basis every time Prism is awarded a new franchise and fresh equity is raised to fund its operations.

In addition to the new shares awarded yesterday, the seven founders also share in a £200,000 payment for waiving their entitlement to take up shares in the rights issue, which is fully underwritten by stockbrokers William de Broe. As a result the directors' stake in Prism will fall from 33.6 per cent to just under 33 per cent.

The founders of Prism are Mr Burley and Peter Shipp, who run Yorkshire Motor Services Group; finance director Giles Fearnley and Stuart Wilde, who run Blazefield Buses; Robert Howells, chairman of the bus company Lynton; and Len Wright, of the bus company Q Drive. The seventh founder is Kenneth Irvine, who used to write papers on privatising British Rail for the Adam Smith Institute, a free market think tank.

Prism has bid for 18 of the 25 rail franchises being sold off and is shortlisted for the ScotRail and North West Regional Railways contracts.

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Sky verdict angers cable firms

Matthew Horsman
Media Editor

UK cable companies yesterday threatened to take their long-running dispute with Rupert Murdoch's BSkyB to Brussels, following confirmation that the Office of Fair Trading had cleared the controversial terms under which Sky makes its pay-TV channels available to cable operators.

The revised rate card, formally approved by the OFT yesterday, will be in effect within 60 days, and determines the conditions of supply of BSkyB's pay-TV programming to cable.

Cable operators will be able to choose among various discount options, and to be eligible for discounts even if they do not take all the Sky channels. They will also be able to offer Sky's new sports channel on an a la carte basis.

"The changes increase the flexibility of cable operators in

marketing their services," said John Bridgeman, director general of the OFT.

But the Cable Communications Association reacted bitterly to the decision. "We fail to see how today's announcement is in the consumers' interest," it said in a statement.

The operators complained that they would still be obliged to take most, if not all the Sky channels. BSkyB, which pioneered the pay-per-view concept in the UK with its Bruno-Tyson and Tyson-Hollyfield broadcasts, was believed to be eager to top the Mirror-backed bid on behalf of its 4 million direct-to-home satellite subscribers.

Mirror Group and BSkyB were last night competing for the pay-per-view broadcasting rights to the Lennox Lewis-Oliver McCall boxing match, scheduled for February. The move marks the first time BSkyB's hold on pay-per-view television has been seriously challenged.

Mirror Group, which owns 46 per cent of the Independent, is brokering its sought-for deal on behalf of the cable industry, which would offer the fight on a pay-per-view basis to its 1.6 million franchise homes.

channels in order to be eligible for discounts. They were also concerned that Sky's schemes were based on revenues per subscriber, rather than on volume. The cable industry is more concerned to build its subscriber base than to maximise revenues per cable connection.

BSkyB's shares rose 13p to close at 487.5p, reflecting the market perception that Sky had

once again escaped regulatory restraints. The City was also cheered by reports that BSkyB was poised to award contracts to the manufacturers of set-top boxes, in anticipation of the launch of digital satellite television in late 1997.

The launch of the digital service had been delayed while the Government considered the terms of formal guidelines covering set-top box technology. These are now likely to be laid before Parliament on Thursday, clearing the way for Sky to award contracts worth up to £200m.

BSkyB's more buoyant share price followed several months of uncertainty, particularly over regulatory concerns and the timing of the digital launch. The shares reached nearly 700p earlier this year, but slid to well below 500p.

Sky has held talks with programme suppliers, retailers and manufacturers about its plans for a digital service.

ITV companies back network shake-up

The 11 ITV companies are to consider a radical plan to set up a new management structure for the Network Centre and the ITV Association, industry sources said last night, writes Matthew Horsman.

The plan, which has the backing of at least three leading ITV companies, would see a managing director appointed to a new company, ITV Ltd, responsible for the network schedule and other ITV-wide activities.

There is a general perception that there needs to be an accountable structure for the network director and the commissioning staff at Network Centre. A senior ITV broadcaster said yesterday: "The current system is not accountable, either for ratings or for administration."

Sources stressed that the new

system would leave intact the regional nature of the ITV system. Requirements governing commissioning at Network Centre, as regulated by the Independent Television Commission, would also be respected.

However, the reorganisation will be seen by many as a further step toward creating a single "Channel 3" brand in the UK, capable of responding to the ratings challenge posed by cable, satellite and the new Channel 5 terrestrial service.

The plan is also consistent with the increasing consolidation of ITV ownership, which could lead to the whole of ITV being controlled by just two or three companies. The market widely expects Yorkshire-Boys to be bought by Granada, while HTV is believed to be in the sights of either United News & Media or Carlton Communications.

Court issues arrest warrant for Levitt

Nic Cicutti

A warrant for the arrest of Roger Levitt, the disgraced former life assurance salesman, was issued yesterday by London magistrates after he failed to appear in court on a summons alleging that he was the "shadow director" of a boxing promotion company in contravention of a disqualification order.

Timothy Workman, a London magistrate, issued the warrant at the Marlborough Street court after hearing that Mr Levitt was overseas and had no plans to return to the UK.

He ordered that the warrant should not be backed by bail to ensure Mr Levitt was taken into immediate custody once the warrant was executed.

The warrant follows an investigation by the Department of Trade and Industry over allegations that Mr Levitt has acted in contravention of the Company Directors (Disqualification) Act 1986.

Nicholas Hobbs, DTI investigating officer, told the court that he had charge of the criminal investigation into Mr Levitt's alleged offence.

In reply to a series of questions from Simon Clements, prosecuting, Mr Hobbs said he wrote to Mr Levitt at his London address in July this year requesting an interview.

Mr Levitt replied by letter on 4 August, saying his professional advisers would not be available to assist him until September. The investigator

said that Mr Levitt wrote a further letter in September, saying that he had not been involved in any business activity since "early 1995", no longer resided in the UK, and had no plans to return here.

When a summons was issued, it was returned marked "refused", and Mr Levitt's wife had said that her husband had left the UK earlier this year, and no longer resided at the address in north London.

Mr Hobbs said the DTI as a result did not think that the summons could be enforced without a warrant being issued for the arrest of Mr Levitt.

He also confirmed that Mr Levitt's solicitors were not being instructed by him in connection with the matter.

After hearing this, Mr Workman granted the application, saying, "there'll be a warrant with no bail".

Roger Levitt: Court heard he plans to stay overseas

Insurance brokers merge

STOCK MARKETS									
Index	Close	Day's change	Change (%)	1996 High	1996 Low	YTD (%)			
FTSE 100	3393.80	+21.40	+0.5	4073.10	2632.30	3.99			
FTSE 250	4471.20	+12.90	+0.3	4968.60	4015.30	3.62			
FTSE 350	1963.50	+9.60	+0.5	2022.10	1816.60	3.31			
FTSE SmallCap	2120.00	+3.61	+0.2	2244.36	1964.06	3.23			
FTSE All-Share	1965.30	+9.03	+0.5	1994.54	1791.95	3.86			
Nasdaq	6326.78	+21.71	+0.3	6547.79	5032.34	2.09			
Dax 100	2042.04	+80.65	+4.0	2266.60	1973.70	0.80			
Hong Kong	12837.48	+153.41	+1.2	13630.95	10204.87	3.22			
Frankfurt	2855.79	+58.08	+2.0	2909.91	2553.36	1.64			

Source: FT Information

INTEREST RATES									
Short sterling*			UK medium gilt			US long bond			
Rate	Yield	Term	Rate	Yield	Term	Rate	Yield	Term	Rate
3m	6.06	6.81	7.52	7.45	7.70	7.61			
6m	6.50	5.75	6.24	5.80	6.60	6.15			
1y	6.22	0.44	2.43	2.65	-	-			
2y	3.72	3.25	5.86	6.10	6.76	6.89			

MAIN PRICE CHANGES									
Index	Close	Day's change	Change (%)	Index	Close	Day's change	Change (%)	Index	Close
Scotia Midco	642.5	30	4.9	Hepworth	250	8.5	3.3	Scotia Midco	642.5
Serdyck Group	132	5.5	4.1	Allied Colloids	120.5	4	3.2	Serdyck Group	132
Telewest Dairies	127.5	5	4.1	Coltech Group	487.5	16	3.2	Telewest Dairies	127.5

CURRENCIES									
S/S					S/GM				
Rate	Yield	Term	Rate	Yield	Rate	Yield	Term	Rate	Yield
\$ (London)	1.6581	-0.01c	1.5386	\$ (New York)	0.6017	-0.14	0.6492	\$ (London)	1.6581
\$ (New York)	1.6581	-0.01c	1.5386	\$ (New York)	0.6017	-0.14	0.6492	\$ (New York)	1.6581
DM (London)	2.9444	+0.02p	2.9028	DM (London)	1.5468	+0.27p	1.4318	DM (London)	2.9444
¥ (London)	198.742	+0.077	156.286	¥ (London)	113.830	+0.475	101.580	¥ (London)	198.742
£ Index	93.2	+0.1	82.5	£ Index	93.1	+0.2	93.9	£ Index	93.2

OTHER INDICATORS									
	Yesterday	Day's chg	Yr Ago		Index	Latest	Yr Ago	Next Page	
Oil Brent \$	23.55	+0.87	17.88	RPI	153.9	+2.7pc	149.8	18 Jan	
Gold \$	368.05	+0.35	387.30	GDP	108.9	+2.3pc	105.7	27 Jan	
Gold £	221.94	-0.72	251.72	Base Rates	—	6.00pc	6.75	—	



COMMENT

If the world's airlines want to ensure healthy competition for their custom when they next update their fleets, then they will make damn certain that the European manufacturer is on every tender list

US deal will not shoot down European rival

British Airways is not renowned as a great supporter of Europe's Airbus Industrie. It has never bought a single one of its jets and indeed is still resentfully referred to in parts of Toulouse as Boeing Airways. So when the BA chairman Sir Colin Marshall says that the merger between Boeing and McDonnell Douglas can be nothing but good news for Airbus, it is worth taking note.

The reasoning goes something like this. The merger will reduce the number of players in the big airliner market to two. If the world's airlines want to ensure healthy competition for their custom when they next update their fleets, then they will make damn certain that the European manufacturer is on every tender list. The market will not allow the Americans to steamroller Airbus into oblivion because it has seen what happens when Boeing has a monopoly. It is no accident that the 747 jumbo jet - available only from Seattle - accounts for more than a third of Boeing's profits.

There are other reasons why the merger should not mean the meltdown on this side of the Atlantic suggested by some observers. One is the simple fact that it will tie Boeing up in knots for at least a year as the combined business beds down. The other is that it removes a bit player with a tired product range from the market, thus eliminating the threat of uncommercial pricing.

In any event, it is by no means obvious that Boeing's primary purpose in buying up McDonnell is to gang up on Airbus. The

increased presence the deal gives Boeing in the military market looks a more compelling motive, particularly now that it also has Rockwell under its belt. Lockheed Martin and Europe's collection of still independent defence manufacturers probably have more to worry about than Airbus does.

None of this means, however, that Airbus can afford to be complacent. One side effect of the merger is to put more onus on the consortium to complete its restructuring into a properly accountable and fully commercial entity, so that it can tap the capital markets for funds and match the efficiencies and economies of scale that Boeing presumably reckons it can wring from Douglas's factories lower down the West Coast.

That is no bad thing. The French partner in Airbus has recently shown signs of wanting to drag its feet. The Boeing-McDonnell deal is perhaps the kick in the shins it needs.

Prism's ratchet to riches takes some beating

Prism Rail's founding investors like to call it the extraordinary money-making wheeze they had built into the company's articles of association a "ratchet scheme". The rest of us will continue to think of it as a racket. Not that it can be faulted, except perhaps as an example of unbridled corporate excess. It's not illegal; nor, given that it is set out in black and white in Prism's original flotation

prospectus, can it be regarded as even remotely questionable. But as an example of how to use the stock market to enrich yourself beyond the dreams of avarice it takes some beating.

Prism Rail is a stock market vehicle set up by a group of successful bus operators specifically for the purpose of bidding for privatised rail franchises. It has proved a wonder stock, rising fivefold since being floated on the alternative investment market last May. What the founding investors did was grant themselves a lorry load of "free" deferred shares, which become convertible into ordinary shares every time they raise money to finance a rail franchise. This is justified on the basis that the founders put up £2.7m of their own money to cover the costs of tendering for the franchises, none of which is refundable should they fail. Perhaps predictably, they haven't. Prism won its fourth franchise yesterday - the West Anglia Great Northern - and duly announced proposals to raise £12m to finance it.

This is where the wheeze gets really clever. The conversion rate for the founders is one free share for every four shares issued. So does that mean the founders get free shares to the value of 25 per cent of the money raised? Don't be naive. The rights issue has been pitched at a deep discount to the current stock market price. Thus for just £12m raised, the founders get £5.4m of worth of free shares. The deeper the discount, the more the founders

get as a proportion of the amount raised. Add in the underwriting fee of an astonishing 3.5 per cent, most of which goes to Williams de Broe (this on a deeply discounted rights, but when there's so much money flying around it's only fair to share it out a bit), and you are looking at a cost of capital of something approaching 50 per cent. Even in the weird and wacky world of venture capital, that's going it.

If these franchises turn out to be the gold mine Williams de Broe and others think they are, then nobody's going to complain. But for ratchet should we perhaps be reading Ponzis? Just watch it.

Let's keep this miracle in perspective

Gosh, it's a miracle, and just in time for Christmas too. In words that could almost have flowed directly from the Chancellor's own office, the OECD has come out firmly in support of the Government's claim that its policies have increased the British economy's potential for growth without inflation. But before Mr Clarke's rhetoric carries us and him away, it is important to get the improvement into perspective. Britain's performance relative to other big industrial countries is not as bad as it once was. We are talking small miracle, although none the less welcome for that.

Conservative triumphalism about this

week's report from the OECD is focusing on the fact that it predicts the UK will have the second-fastest growth rate in the G7 for the next two years, and has enjoyed higher than average growth since 1993. It should be borne in mind, however, that UK growth was lower than the G7 average during the preceding downturn. The new forecasts thus demonstrate the well-known fact - that the British economy is more volatile than most others.

The organisation reserves its real praise for the fact that it reckons inflation will remain in abeyance at least until 1998, the fifth year of growth at or above trend. According to the OECD, the new flexibility of the labour market is paying off, with no sign of upward pressure on wages. Look at the detail, however, and you see that the OECD is going out on a limb to justify these forecasts. Its economists reckon that only a quarter point rise in base rates is required to keep inflation below the 2.5 per cent target. This is a good deal more optimistic than others. Most economists are talking about base rates rising from the current 6 per cent to more than 7 per cent in a year or two.

And despite the OECD's optimism, it is still predicting that the UK inflation rate will remain one of the highest in the G7. Scptics might note that it is easy to achieve a better than normal performance in a low-inflation world. The longer the economy grows at an above-normal pace, and the faster unemployment falls, the greater the danger that wages and inflation will pick up.

BoE set to launch a challenger to Target

Peter Rodgers
Financial Editor

The Bank of England yesterday stepped up a row with France and Germany over the Target settlement system for the euro, by threatening to launch a cut-price rival service if Britain stays out of the single currency.

The threat emerged in a speech by Howard Davies, deputy governor of the Bank, and was reiterated in the Bank's quarterly report on preparations for monetary union.

It is understood the Bank has begun detailed work on preparing a UK system which would be brought into action if France and Germany refuse to back down over Target.

Experts believe a London-based rival could operate with much lower costs and attract settlement business for the new currency away from continental centres, bypassing Target.

With 500 banks, London has the critical mass needed to start a new service, and a rival UK system would be open to any continental bank to use.

The sensitivity of the issue arises because Target will be a vital part of the new monetary system to be operated by the European Central Bank. It will clear the largest payments in euros across national borders, linking national settlement systems.

But France and Germany have been pressing to prevent banks from countries that do not join the single currency having full access to the new service. This has been fiercely resisted by the Bank of England.

The Bank is enthusiastic about Target because it will bring a big reduction in the risks of settlement between European countries by transferring very large sums of money in-

stantly between banks, rather than allowing delays of several hours between the dispatch and receipt. This "real time" settlement eliminates the risk of a domino collapse if one bank fails to deliver.

Mr Davies said in a speech in London "denying even-handed access to Target would negate one of the main purposes of the whole exercise, to reduce the risk inherent in systems in which banks are exposed to each other for a period of hours".

Banks would find ways round the restriction which would be more risky, so central banks across Europe will have scored an own goal, he added.

Last Friday, the Ecu Banking Association announced plans for a conventional rather than real-time euro settlement system, which it claimed could take 40 per cent of the market.

One possible option, said Mr Davies, would be for the UK to develop its own real-time settlement system for euros "to allow quick, efficient and safe euro payments within the UK which would not rely on access to intra-day credit from the euro area".

The key issue is that France and Germany want non-member countries settling through Target to be refused credit from the European Central Bank during the working day.

Short-term credit is essential to keeping a large settlement system working, and the Bank of England's alternative proposals would achieve this without asking for credit from the ECB.

One option would be to set up a separate real-time UK clearing system for euros but use continental branches of British banks - which will have access to Target - to provide credit when the system needed it.

Insurance brokers merge

Peter Rodgers

A new phase in the rationalisation of insurance broking began yesterday with the announcement of a surprise £300m merger between Lloyd Thompson and JIB, two medium-sized London firms.

The merged company will be third largest by market capitalisation after Sedgwick and Willis Corroon.

JIB was floated in 1991 by Jardine Matheson, which still owns a 60 per cent stake. This will be diluted to 34 per cent after the merger.

Jardine is backing the deal, which was first discussed between the two brokers two years ago but put on ice because of uncertainties over the future of the Lloyd's insurance market which have now been resolved. Talks were revived about six weeks ago.

Ken Carter, chief executive of Lloyd Thompson, who will play the same role in the merged group, said the merger was not a defensive move just to make

cost savings but intended to exploit the exact fit between the two.

His own firm was predominantly a London market insurance and reinsurance broker and had tried in recent years to develop in Asia and Latin America. JIB was "fantastically well established" in Asia Pacific because of its connection with Jardine.

The only area where there was a potential for conflict was in the London energy insurance market, but even there the two companies had different geographical specialities - JIB in Africa and Asia and Lloyd Thompson in America and Scandinavia, he said.

The new company, to be called Jardine Lloyd Thompson, will be chaired by John Barton, now chief executive of JIB, whose shares shot up 21p to 130p after the terms were announced. Lloyd Thompson rose 1.5p to 174p.

The offer, to be made by Lloyd Thompson through Phoenix Securities, is of four new Lloyd Thompson shares for every five JIB shares.



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SPORT FOR ART'S SAKE

A new book offers a fascinating history of the different images of sport through the ages.

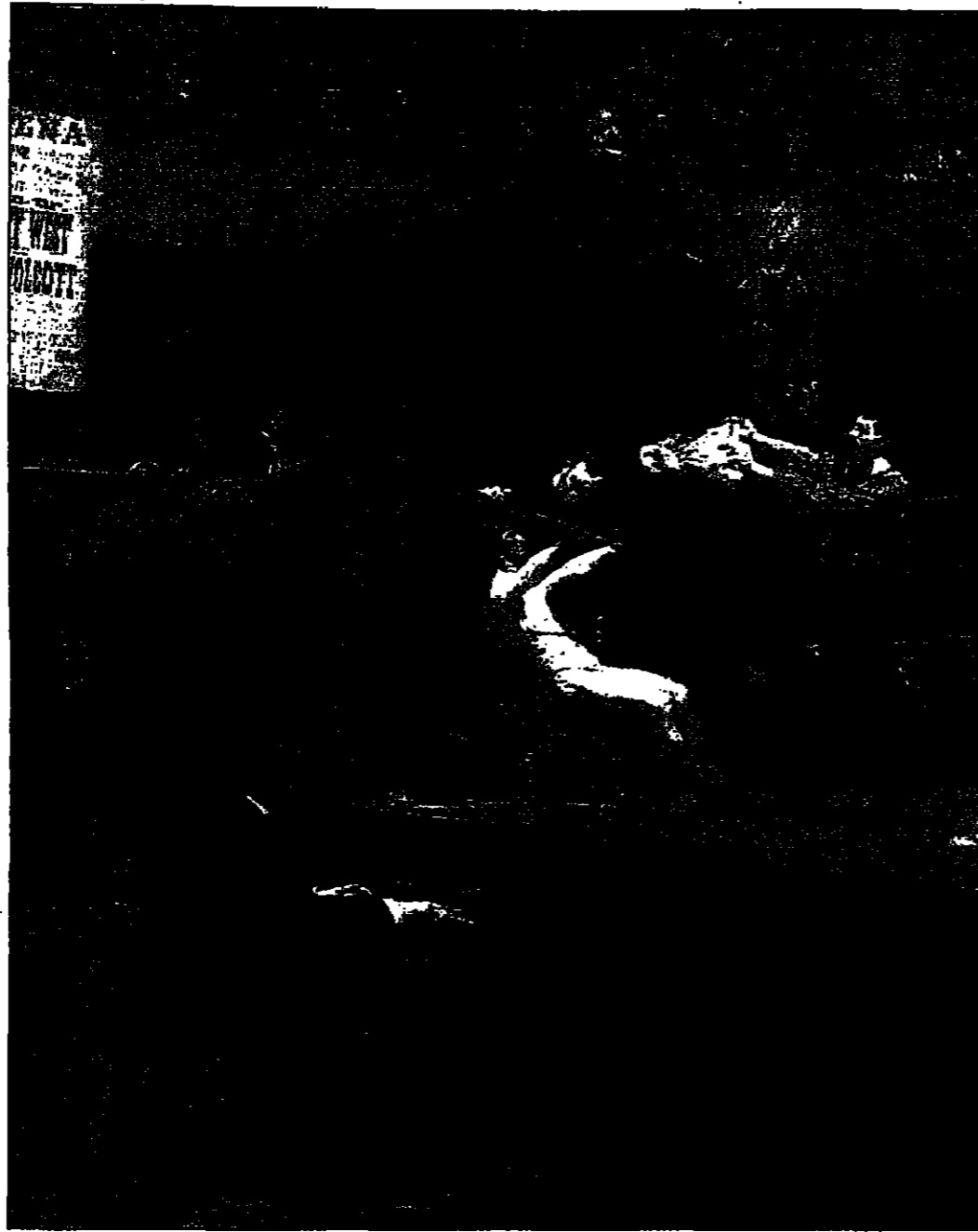
By Andrew Graham-Dixon

A few years ago, the powers that be decided to redecorate the home and away dressing-rooms at Wembley Stadium. The designer responsible had what he thought was a marvellous idea, which was to paint a large mural in each based on the early 20th-century, Cubist-influenced painting of the Italian Futurist Umberto Boccioni, *The Dynamism of a Footballer*. This interestingly abstract image may still be seen in the away changing-room, but in the home dressing-room it was immediately whitewashed over and replaced with three red lions. Umberto Boccioni? Italian Futurism? Did Graham Taylor not like that?

The British sportsman is not traditionally noted for his art appreciation, but Peter Kuhnt's new book, *Sport: A Cultural History in the Mirror of Art*, aims to change all that. This is that rarity, an art book aimed at people interested in sport, and it deserves to succeed if only on the grounds of the publisher's bravery. This fascinating anthology of sport-related paintings, prints and photographs turns out to be particularly rich on the subject of football. The Boccioni painting Taylor so disliked is naturally present but so are much less familiar images, one of the most remarkable being a late 17th-century Florentine engraving which proves (among other things) that Italy always was the most advanced European footballing nation.

Alessandro Cecchini's *A Game of Calcio on the Piazza Santa Croce*, 1689, shows two teams lined up against one another at the start of a football match – "calcio" being an Italian forerunner of football – in one of Florence's most picturesque city squares. The players, quaintly, are holding hands, rather as modern international footballers sometimes do while their national anthem is being played. Both teams appear to be playing the same tactical formation, and a fiendishly impenetrable defensive one it is too: 15 men up front, 11 in midfield, with a back line made up of no fewer than 12 goalkeepers. The result of the game in question remains unknown but it seems safe to assume that it was a typically Italian, low-scoring affair. At a time when football in most other countries was liable to be played by a motley rabble, entirely without rules or referees, generally using some improvised object such as the severed head of an executed criminal for a ball, Cecchini's *Game of Calcio* looks like a comparatively ordered event. The effect, however, may be deceptive, because once the match got going it was still a very much rougher business than the game played now.

According to the erudite Mr Kuhnt it was Antonio Scaino, a Ferrarese courtier, huntsman, author and footballer (a true Renaissance man) who was the first person to describe the appeal of a sport yet to be known as the Beautiful Game:



"Football may not be regulated with as much art as other sports," wrote Scaino, "but it provides the spectators with such pleasure because the game is superior to all others in imitating a real battle with all its sudden shifts of fate. The players tumble over one another, now here, now there, and it is a game that more than any other shows the mettle of the runners and the clever and powerful wrestlers." Fatalities were not uncommon – a total of eight players dying, for instance, during the course of a game in Siena in the mid-16th century, and on the evidence of this book it seems fairly safe to say that the current television advertisement for Adidas, based on a 15th-century fresco cycle by Bernardino Betti (surely a first in sports advertising) is indeed a pure fantasy. Those who have seen the ad will recall Alessandro del Piero, of Juventus, skipping through a crowd of bamboozled Renaissance men in tight to score a brilliant virtuoso goal – but of course during the Renaissance itself his legs probably would have been broken before he ever received the ball. The likes of Del Piero would never have lasted the pace of 12-goalie calcio. Back in the days when manslaughter was no more than a bookable offence, even someone like Vinnie Jones would probably have been regarded as a luxury player.

It can be difficult for those of us living in the late 20th century to grasp just how much more violent most sporting activity once was.

Sport: A Cultural History does much to remedy that. The often vivid illustrations to early instruction manuals for wrestlers, boxers or fencers (a particularly gruesome example here being an anonymous early 17th-century woodcut called, with graphic accuracy, *On Guard Position: Slab Through the Eye*) remind us that sport was not, originally, a health-enhancing leisure activity but a preparation for war. The English longbowman of the 15th

Equestrianism, likewise, was a fundamentally martial skill, horses being the armoured vehicles of yore. Military training was one obvious and explicit function of the elaborate royal tournaments staged from the Middle Ages until the early Renaissance, and depicted with varying degrees of competence (most brilliantly perhaps in the etchings of Lucas Cranach the Elder) by a large number of artists, but even the becalmed equestrian paint-



Between Rounds (left) by the American painter Thomas Eakins captures the darker side of man while *Dynamism of a Footballer* (above) by Italian Futurist Umberto Boccioni was the basis for a mural that brightened Wembley's dressing-rooms until shown the red card in Graham Taylor's regime

Grand National, whether intentionally or not, also invoke the military roots of equestrian sport when they refer to the race (as they do every year) as a "cavalry charge."

Art reminds us too that even acrobatics and gymnastics, among the most graceful of modern sports, were originally conceived of as ways of hardening the body, of making it more flexible and agile, in readiness for combat. There was always an element of exuberant, carnivalesque showmanship involved too, because gymnastics owes its origins as much to the fairground as to military necessity – plain to see in a wonderful late 16th-century woodcut of that daring young man, Arcangelo Taccaro, gymnast extraordinaire and tutor in acrobatics to the King of France, jumping the death-defying *salto mortale* through no fewer than 10 hoops.

Ken Jones' as often made the point, in the pages of this newspaper, that boxing is not really a sport at all – and he is quite right, at least in the sense that it is the only modern sport to have preserved intact so much of the violence, intensity and threat of warfare. Of course, boxing too is somewhat less brutal than it once was, as Thomas Rowlandson's early 19th-century print, *Boxing Match for 200 Guineas between Dutch Sam and Medley* demonstrates: in a ring made purely of spectators squatting on the bare ground (this is the origin of the term "ring", which has become puzzlingly square since the legalisation of boxing) we see two men with bare knuckles squaring up to one another. The inscription attached to it reads thus: "At one o'clock the two champions entered the ring and Sam had for his second Harry Lee while Joe Ward officiated for Medley. After a severe and bloody contest of 40 rounds victory was decided in favour of Sam." But although nobody was fighting 40 rounds by the end of the 19th century, and although the contestants had been equipped with gloves by then, the great American painter Thomas Eakins still saw box-

ing for the primitive spectacle that it remained. His *Between Rounds*, 1899, is one of the masterpieces of sporting art. A scrawny boxer tended by his seconds slumps back into his corner; he is a meagre hero and his body gives off a pallid, slightly other-worldly light. The centre of the spectacle, he is like a glow-worm and also (perhaps the painter wanted us to think this) a little like a latterday Christ. He is a sacrificial victim certainly. Boxing tends to bring out more in painters than many other sports, perhaps because it is such a primal spectacle, both unpleasant and also moving in the starkness with which it shows the darker side of man to man. Bullfighting, which inspired both Goya and Picasso to create remarkable works of art, (sadly omitted by Kuhnt) is a similar case – a sport almost too troubling to be thought of simply as such.

But in the 20th century, when the vast majority of athletes have ridden and run and jumped and played ball for a less savage sense of achievement than that of the boxer or the bullfighter, the shadow of true, life-endangering violence has mostly disappeared from sporting view – although it has, occasionally, reared its head, notably in totalitarian circumstances. Both Stalin and Hitler consciously revived an ancient and essentially warlike cult of sport in Russia and Germany in the 1930s, a fact mirrored by the fondness both dictators shared for chilly Neoclassical paintings and sculptures of the male and female athlete.

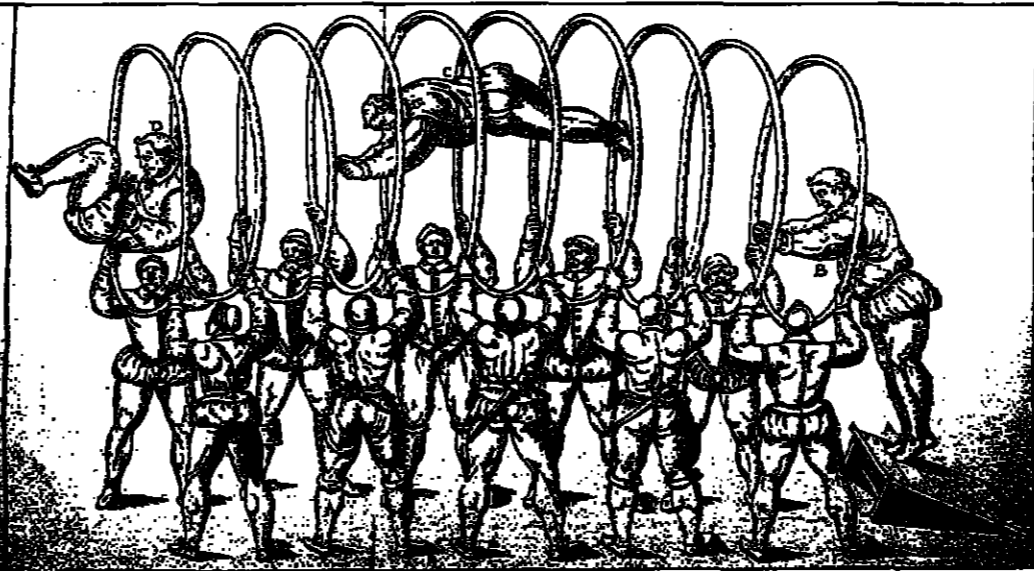
In Germany, the Aryan master race was to demonstrate its fitness to rule the world partly through the achievement of daunting physical fitness; and the paintings of athletes produced in such quantities under Nazism, by the likes of now-forgotten artists like Gerhard Keil or Jürgen Wegener, were designed to make modern Germans look as much as possible like ancient Greeks – as well-muscled as the mules of Phidias, they were to resemble Homeric heroes, ready for the epic adventures of the 10,000-year Reich. The most terrifying of all the images to record Hitler's programme of "national physical rearmament" through the pursuit of sport is not a painting. It is Leni Riefenstahl's unforgettable propaganda photograph, *Mass Exercises in the Olympic Stadium, Berlin, 1936*. Viewed from far above the ground, we see endless relays of men, bare-chested, performing press-ups in the shadow of the Olympic flag – line after line after line of them, dwarfed to the size of ants by the lofty perspective, a never-ending army of white athletes stretching as far as the eye can see. Only a picture can take you back to the past with such instant immediacy. Looking at Riefenstahl's extraordinary, brilliant, vile image, you can perhaps, albeit more than half a century later, begin to sense how sweet the victories of the great black sprinter Jesse Owens, gained in that same stadium, in that same year, must have tasted.

The likes of Del Piero would never have lasted the pace of 12-goalie calcio. Back in the days when manslaughter was no more than a bookable offence, even someone like Vinnie Jones would probably have been regarded as a luxury player

century owed their proficiency to a royal statute which insisted that every fit and able yeoman should practise archery on the village green at least three times a week. The statute was enforced extremely rigorously using the stocks, among other things, as a powerful incentive to comply. But Henry V's chief concern was not (it need hardly be said) the physical well-being of the nation. Compulsory archery practice was sport perhaps, but sport in deadly earnest – as the French who died in their thousands under the terrible rain of English arrows at Agincourt were to discover.

ings of Stubbs, painted late in the 18th century, still carried vestiges of military symbolism. The steeliness of his gaze and the hauteur of his bearing, unmistakably if understatedly conveyed by the painter, have their own significance. The British gentleman's passion for bloodstock, for hunting and for horseracing, was not as trivial, not as merely diverting, as some now assume it to have been. Every time the aristocrat rode out at hounds, he was rehearsing his role in the cavalry of the British Empire. This strand of associations has not yet been cut: modern commentators on the

As weaponry became more sophisticated and the fitness of the human body became consequently less essential to victory in warfare, many of the most ancient and aggressive sporting activities changed in character, becoming softer, more sophisticated, more stylised. Peter Kuhnt believes that gradually "combat became choreography, while strength and speed became pose and posture" and the images of sport in art bear him out to some extent. The rough-and-tumble of the joust or tournament ceased to interest the courtiers of later times and they mastered other and more el-



Alessandro Cecchini's *A Game of Calcio on the Piazza Santa Croce* (left) illustrates the 17th century's fiendish 12-11-15 system. The anonymous *Gymnast* (above) shows a different beauty of form in a sport which was once a preparation for warfare rather than, like football, a reflection of it

Black predicts bright future with BAA

Athletics
MIKE ROWBOTTOM

Roger Black predicted yesterday that the new British Athletics Association could put a smile back on the face of the sport and start filling its stadiums again.

The double Olympic silver medalist believes that the days of high-profile rows like Michael Johnson being banned from running at Crystal Palace and the pay dispute involving Linford Christie, Colin Jackson and John Regis may be over.

Communication barriers with the British Athletic Federation had been dismantled amid a new spirit of co-operation, Black declared at the launch of the association in London. No sanctions exist for athletes who choose not to toe the BAA line, but the group of leading athletes who turned up to yesterday's launch were all hopeful that the new relationship with the governing body would lead to a smoother operation.

There are 19 directors of the limited company, including Black, Christie, Jackson, Regis, Jonathan

Edwards and Sally Gunnell. Already, they have formed a new company with the BAF to run televised meetings from next year. And Black and the high jumper Geoff Parsons were at the table for negotiations about a new television contract.

Alan Pascoe, responsible for sales of sponsorship for British Athletics, said: "The fact that the athletes are now a concerted group has made a huge difference to prospective sponsors. The presence of a full-time executive means that they are in a position to deliver athletes."

Black admitted: "There were a lot of unhappy athletes during the 1995 season. Relationships with the federation, sponsors and the press were probably at an all-time low. For the first time the athletes started communicating with one another. Then we recognised we had to be at the heart of the sport."

"The most important thing about us is that we care about athletics. Hopefully, this will be the beginning of a new environment for the sport. We want to make it more attractive to watch. None of us likes walking into an empty stadium."

Gordon puts Anchorians on top

Hockey
BILL COLWILL

Neil Gordon shot Anchorians to the top of the Nastro Azzurro South Premier with a well-taken hat-trick as the Kent side beat Maidenhead 4-2 to go two points clear of Hampstead and Westminster.

Mike Gillott got the fourth with Adrian Hurley and Andy Pearce responding for Maidenhead.

Hampstead, previous leaders on goal difference, dropped points in a 2-2 draw at Paddington to Cup giant-killers High Wycombe.

After Nigel Land had twice given the Middlessex club the lead, Wycombe fought back with goals from Andy Burroughs and Rob Cheate. Wycombe, having been reduced at one stage to nine men following temporary suspensions, scored the equaliser with four minutes remaining.

Chichester, with goals from Andrew Savory, Brian Lock, Gregg Watson and Danny Jaeger, beat Beckenham 4-2 to slip into third place. Beckenham's goals came from David Knox and David Fenfold. The much-awaited Division One

clash between Purley and Old Cranleighs ended in a convincing 5-0 win for Purley. Paddy Osborn, who was the first player to 150 National League goals while with Reading earlier in the season, scored twice with a brace also from Doug Bolger and the fifth from P J Weller.

Old Cranleighs' Welsh internationals, David Knapp and Jon Rees, were unable to respond although there was perhaps some excuse for their third international, Don Williams, whose wife, Gail, gave birth to their first child a few hours earlier.

Sport for Art's sake
A new book offers a fascinating history of sporting images, page 19

Jordan wary
Nigel Mansell's F1 return may depend on a novel pay formula, page 21

Eriksson will join Rovers next summer

Football
MARK BURTON

Sven Goran Eriksson has committed himself to taking charge at Blackburn next summer, even if Rovers lose their Premiership place in May.

Blackburn's chairman, Robert Coar, confirmed yesterday that Eriksson's three-year contract was "unconditional" and that he would be the next Rovers manager come what may. The Swede's commitment will avoid the possibility of the caretaker manager, Tony Parkes, presiding over the club's relegation and then finding himself in line for the caretaker manager's job.

Parkes, admitting that he faces a "long hard season", added: "We are all relieved the managerial situation has been resolved, but there is a lot of work ahead between now and when the new man comes in."

"I have said all along that I didn't want the job on a permanent basis, but it now looks like I could be the longest serving caretaker in history!" Eriksson has admitted he is "pleased and honoured" at being named Blackburn's manager. He will not be giving any interviews about the job, but he will be able to work with Parkes as Rovers seek out new players.

Coar said: "We can now look to transfer matters and it is fair to assume that any deals will be done in consultation with the new manager. Players throughout the football world will now be able to see our long-term objectives and know who they will be playing for."

It is still possible that Eriksson's Italian club, Sampdoria, will agree to release him from his contract before the end of the season. However, they would

have to find a replacement for the 49-year-old Swede, who has an impressive pedigree having managed Gothenburg, Benfica twice, Roma and Fiorentina. He is in his fifth year at Sampdoria.

Eriksson, who is widely regarded as a tactically astute coach, faces a dramatic change of lifestyle when he leaves the Mediterranean behind him and heads to the north-west of Eng-

Eriksson in frame for Blackburn job



Eriksson (above) will move to Ewood Park next year, as revealed in the Independent on 11 November (top)

land. No details of his contract have been revealed, but it is believed he will become the highest paid manager in Blackburn's history.

Arsenal's David Platt, who played for two seasons under Eriksson at Sampdoria, said: "He has already proved himself to be a coach of the very highest calibre in Sweden, Italy and

Portugal and I am certain he will have a really positive impact at Blackburn. The Rovers players will enjoy his training methods and will respect his exceptional tactical awareness."

Vinnie Jones, the Wimbledon captain, has been fined a week's wages, estimated at £4,000, for a micky-taking article about his team-mates. The Welsh international midfielder, who also donated his £2,000 fee from the newspaper to the players' pool, insists he has learned his lesson. The Wimbledon chairman, Sam Hammam, who received a personal apology along with their manager, Joe Kinnear, and every individual player, believes Jones came very close to destroying his position as captain.

The consortium headed by the local businessman Sandy Anderson bidding to take control of Nottingham Forest says an offer to join forces with the rival group led by the Monte Carlo-based millionaire Lawrie Lewis has been rejected. Anderson thought linking up with Lewis would help "the long-term success and well being of the club" but said the offer met with a cool response. The Lewis consortium, which also contains the former Tottenham chairman Irving Scholar, is the favourite to take over.

The speed with which Avon and Somerset Police submit reports on the crowd trouble at Ashton Gate will determine how long Bristol City and Bristol Rovers have to wait to see what action they face from the Football Association.

George Weah, Milan's Liberian striker who has just won Fifa's Fair Play Award, has had a one-match ban for head-butting Porto's Jorge Costa after a European Champions' League match, extended to six games.



Paraguay's Julio Cesar Enciso (left) takes on Roger Suarez, of Bolivia, during their World Cup qualifier on Sunday

Photograph: Reuters

FA gives Notley time to reform

Jay Notley has been given three months to reform the Football Association yesterday deferred sentence for his triple drugs offence.

The 18-year-old Charlton midfielder admitted taking cannabis, cocaine and Ecstasy at a party the weekend before a mobile testing unit caught him out at the club's training ground on 4 November.

Last season two more experienced players, Roger Stanislaus and Craig Whittington, were banned for a year and six months respectively for serious drugs offences.

Yesterday, however, the FA disciplinary commission took Notley's age into account and treated him kindly, deferring sentence for three months while he undergoes rehabilitation and counselling. He will not be allowed to play during that time.

Payback time for Huckerby

Kevin Keegan is hoping Darren Huckerby does not make Newcastle pay for sending him to Coventry at Highfield Road tonight.

Keegan sold Huckerby to the Sky Blues last month in a £1m deal. But the Magpies' manager admits Huckerby has the potential to make him regret letting the 20-year-old striker go. "He has got things going for him and he could rebound on us like any player you sell," Keegan said.

"But it was my decision to sell him and you've just got to have the courage to take risks. We've got to live with that risk whenever we play against teams we've sold players to."

Keegan stresses his decision to sell Huckerby was no reflection on the player's potential but the result of having an embarrassment of riches where for-

wards are concerned. "When you look at what he had in front of him it doesn't mean to say he can't be a very talented player in the future," said Keegan.

"He had Alan Shearer, Les Ferdinand, Tino Asprilla and Paul Kitson ahead of him and that's a lot of competition."

"He'd been here a year and was definitely coming on but he was just a little bit too far away from the team and I felt the lad should go on and further his career somewhere else."

Huckerby is hoping Coventry can give Gordon Strachan his first win nearly six weeks after taking over from Ron Atkinson but admits he would like to see Newcastle lift the title and fears for Keegan's future if the Magpies do not win a trophy this season.

"Kevin is under a lot of pressure now from the media and the

supporters and he's got to win things this season," Huckerby said. "I don't know what will happen if that isn't the situation considering the amount of money spent. The chairman has got to see some reward for the amount of investment he has made."

"But I do want Newcastle to win the League and the cups if we don't manage it. It is a fantastic club and it is well documented how much I admire Peter Beardsley."

"It will be a special game for me but I won't be thinking about my time there come kick-off, just getting three points for Coventry. I think we just need a win to kick things into action and hopefully it will be against Newcastle."

Strachan says Huckerby must not turn tonight's clash into a personal mission to prove Keegan wrong. "Darren's got nothing to prove to Newcastle United and Kevin Keegan. He's got to prove himself to Coventry City, the coaches and the supporters," he said.

Keegan admits that Newcastle must make the most of matches against the Blues. Coventry if they are to maintain their title challenge, also knows from experience that last Monday's goalless draw at Nottingham Forest, with teams battling for Premiership survival are tough to beat.

"If we play like we're capable of playing, Coventry is a realistic three-pointer for us," having said that, teams at the bottom, like Coventry, are capable of turning over the big teams.

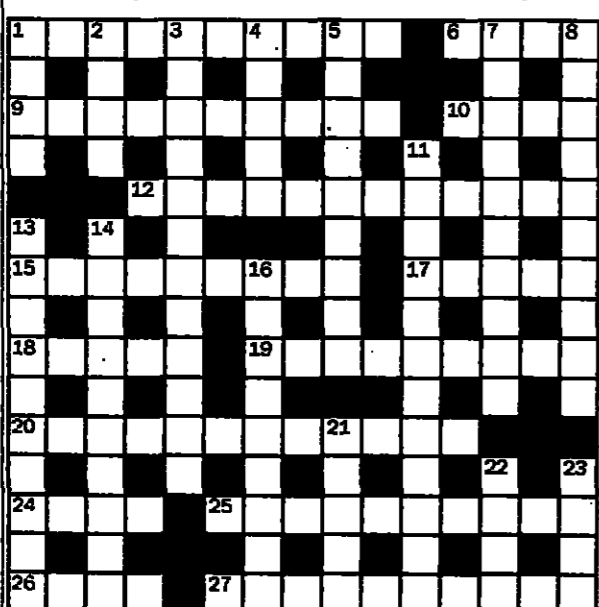
"They've got some very good players and I think it surprises a lot of people that they are down at the bottom of the division."

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3172, Tuesday 17 December

By Aired

Monday's Solution



STUPID SHOWDOWN
O E R T V A O
I N O R D I N A T E M O R M
N S V N R T O
R E V E R E N D L I B E R
V R O A S
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E G I N E O K
F R E E H A N D R E P O S E

ACROSS

- 1 Military assistant with funny idea has to leave quickly (4-2-4)
- 6 Fruit from Malibu glistens (4)
- 9 Country where you could find a slave Lord? (2,8)
- 10 Memory holds, initially, equivalent of 500 sheets (4)
- 12 Type of cake with one wine, cold, for priests (12)
- 15 A thing to protect one upset lion with stronger reason (1,8)
- 17 Bird flies back round a hut village (5)
- 18 Place where destructive insect has laid out off (5)
- 19 Meet up in a state of anxiety to produce a cake (9)
- 20 They could help cameramen to be discoverers of mountains? (12)
- 24 Account about farm land? (4)
- 25 Unpredictable island has conservative debts (10)
- 26 Bring fellow away to do engraving (4)
- 27 Tolerant for a letter? (10)

DOWN

- 1 A society girl getting up would no longer be so (4)
- 2 Unhappy about hard run (4)
- 3 Awfully idle jazz fan visits German town's food shop (12)
- 4 Move slowly to give credit to boring type (5)
- 5 Satellite's to excel? Rubbish (9)
- 7 Dogs Hamlet etc? (5,5)
- 8 A mute claim articulated is not spotted (10)
- 11 Note receipts adapted for freely established rates (6,6)
- 13 Do material up and it could be this (6,4)
- 14 Study money in US, endlessly wealthy, with but one focus (10)
- 16 One in ten boats could be immovable (9)
- 21 Wheat's not quite a failure - odd (5)
- 22 Centres of potential to Jersey etc. (4)
- 23 Lies drunk? Rum could be the answer! (4)

Back injury may end Irani's England tour

Cricket

DEREK PRINGLE
reports from Bulawayo

The fall-out from England's one-day defeat has started already. With the first Test match against Zimbabwe just a day away, England's minimal squad of 14 may yet be depleted further as Ronnie Irani yesterday went for a scan on an injured back.

With the Test so close, a quick diagnosis was obviously what was needed. Unfortunately, the only scanner up to the job of investigating what is wrong with one of England's finest happens to be in Harare. Irani may, in the words of the England coach, David Lloyd, be a "pivotal figure" in England's set-up, but he is obviously not too precious, after being sent hot-foot to the nation's capital by car, a hot five-hour journey that should have at least stirred up his symptoms.

Irani who played in Sunday's debacle in Bulawayo, has suffered back problems before and he experienced a twinge in England's recent game against Zimbabwe, managing just 22 overs in the second innings.

Quite how a player can be fit enough to bowl one day, and rushed off on a long trip to hos-

pital the next almost defies logic. But then England abroad always manage to confound even their most grizzled observers.

Irani, who is a spirited cove, may have thought he was doing the right thing by passing himself fit. If he was a 100 per cent, then fine. If not, it was a reckless act that quite probably cost England the game. Albeit a game they had no right to win.

It was in his first full season with Essex in 1994 that Irani first had problems. A stress fracture - a common injury among pace bowlers - was diagnosed, a problem he overcame with rest and a radically remodelled action: a chest-on bowling style that relies solely on the arm to generate pace and one that has looked fairly lightweight on the slow batting tracks so far experienced on this tour.

Should he have to fly home, England are likely to replace him for like, and call up another all-rounder - a role David Lloyd has stressed is not just a disguise for a seventh batsman.

However, with Mark Ealham injured, Adam Holoake or Craig White are the obvious candidates, though frustrated masochists may plump for the much chastised Chris Lewis.

Holoake, who has just returned from captaining a suc-

cessful England A side in Australia, would probably be favourite. Like Irani though, his bowling can be unpenetrative and expensive, and he would lean towards being a seventh batsman should he arrive on the next British Airways flight out of Gatwick.

That leaves White and Lewis, who offer a stronger bowling option in a team that needs something snappy to complement Darren Gough.

Whatever the outcome, neither Irani nor his replacement are likely to be available in time for Test selection, and with Jack Russell so far surplus to requirements, England will essentially be picking their Test team from just 12 fit men. A position that has left them open to further embarrassment before a Test ball has been bowled, should further injury beset them at practice today.

The Yorkshire spinner Zac Morris helped England Under-19s to a 338-run victory against Lahore Cricket Association's youngsters as he took six wickets to help dismiss the hosts for just 99. England declared on their overnight total of 181 for 9 to leave Lahore needing an improbable 438 for victory. They were all out soon after lunch on the third and final day.

Williams' trial date

Motor racing

Frank Williams and five other people are to go on trial in February in Italy charged with manslaughter following the death of Ayrton Senna.

Williams' Italian lawyer, Roberto Causo, said the first hearing would be on 20 February in Imola, where Senna, the three-times world champion, was killed when his Williams Formula One car crashed into a wall at the Tamborello curve during the San Marino Grand Prix on 1 May 1994.

The Williams team issued a

statement expressing their disappointment that their chief executive, Frank Williams, Patrick Head, the technical director, and Adrian Newey, the chief designer, had been charged.

"We do not believe that the charges are well founded and intend to do all that is necessary to defend our position and contest the charges," the statement said. Causo said the Williams trio denied all charges.

The Imola race track director, Federico Bendinelli, and a former track official, Giorgio Poggi, face similar charges, which they also deny.

Mansell's demands, page 21

Wembley awaits verdict

Sports politics

Wembley was yesterday preparing to celebrate getting the go-ahead to be the £180m home of Britain's new National Stadium.

The decision on the location for the nation's showpiece sporting venue is due to be announced by the UK Sports Council at a news conference in London this morning and it is certain Wembley has got the nod over Manchester to be turned into a new look, Olympic-class 80,000-seater stadium.

That will be possible through

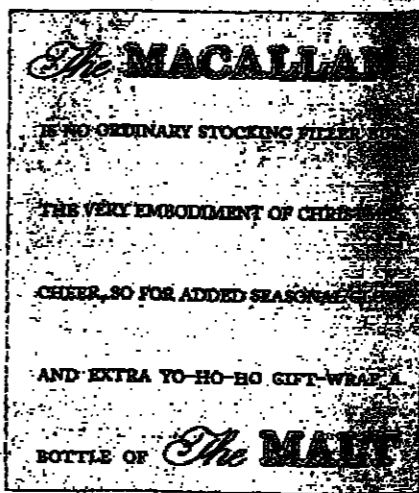
around £100m of National Lottery funding, with the rest coming from private sector sponsors. The Wembley firm, which will see the old stadium virtually rebuilt from scratch with only the famous twin towers remaining, has received public and enthusiastic backing from the Football Association, the British Athletic Federation and the Rugby Football League.

There is likely to be some consolation for Manchester in the form of another Lottery grant to pay for a smaller stadium to host the 2002 Commonwealth Games.

A DELIVERY MAN



The MALT



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